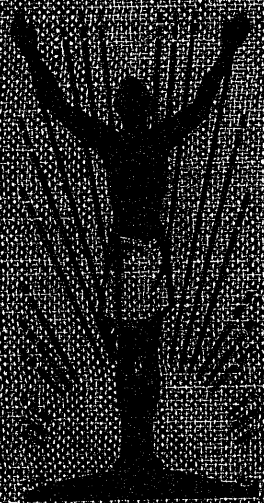


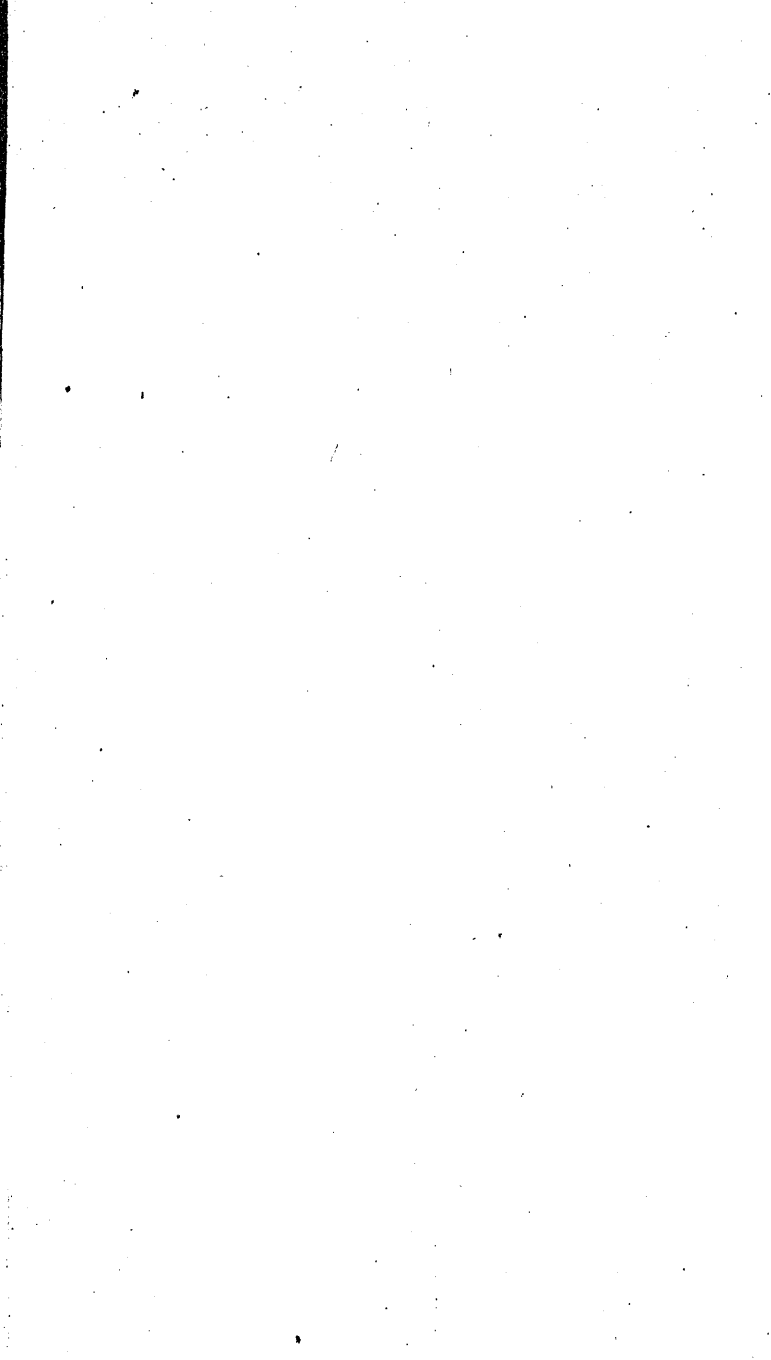
# CALMOUR OF THE MONGOLS



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GILMOUR OF THE MONGOLS

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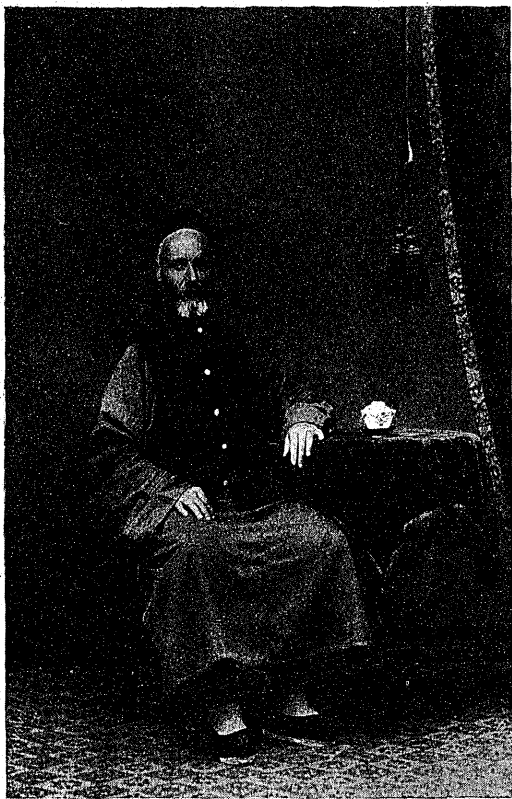
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# GILMOUR OF THE MONGOLS

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BY

W. P. NAIRNE

AUTHOR OF

'GREATHEART OF PAPUA'

ETC.

'Is the kingdom a harvest field? Then I  
thought it reasonable that I should seek to  
work where the work was most abundant  
and the workers fewest.'

JAMES GILMOUR.

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**RESEARCH**

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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## PROLOGUE

What God writes upon thy brow that thou wilt come to.

KORAN.

It was a June evening in the year 1843, and in a certain part of the grass lands on the far Mongolian plain a cluster of dome-shaped tents gleamed in the light of the setting sun. A score of fierce-looking dogs, the inevitable complement of every nomad colony in that region, snarled over the remains of the evening meal. In the distance a flock of sheep browsed on the coarse grass of the plain while a number of sturdy Mongolian horses wandered at liberty across the wide expanse.

Within one of the tents a young Mongol, seated on a sheepskin mat, read slowly from the pages of a book. He was rather proud of his achievement, for few of his people could read a word, but this strange volume puzzled him and taxed the resources of his usually alert intelligence. A few

months before he had picked up the book in a store at Kiachta on the Siberian frontier, and its strange history interested the Mongol greatly, for it was the Sacred Book of the mysterious Englishmen who for over twenty years had sought to teach a new religion to the people of northern Mongolia. He remembered the tale he had been told regarding them. Everybody said they were good men but surely peculiar, since they had come thousands of miles from their island home for no other reason than to teach the Jesus religion. They did not live in comfort as the Russians did, but wandered about among the Mongols, healing their sick and telling them of a Greater One than Buddha.

It was all very extraordinary, and the Mongol thought that perhaps the Russian Government was acting wisely when they expelled these foreigners from the country and made an end of their mission. But this strange Book, which they had translated into the Mongol language and scat-

tered broadcast, still remained. Its phrases puzzled him ; its unfamiliar stories left him bewildered, but his curiosity was aroused. He almost wished these strangers were here again to make plain to him the hidden meaning of this Book, but they were far away now and no one of their race was ever likely to venture into the forbidden land once more. In all that vast country there was not a soul to reveal to him the wonder of this new religion.

The Mongol laid the Book aside, rose from his mat and went to the door of his tent. Above him fluttered the little prayer flag, and like the pious Buddhist he was, he counted his beads, said a few prayers, and went out to look after his sheep ere the darkness fell.

And at that same hour the morning sun shone gloriously across the valley of the Clyde and glinted on the thatched roof and whitewashed walls of a cottage with crowfooted gables, that stood by the road-

side in the little village of Cathkin, a few miles from Glasgow. No one was about at that early hour as the gentle breeze rustled the leaves and the birds twittered among the branches. In the timber yard at the back of the house an unfinished cart stood as the wright had left it the night before, and from the top of it a cock crowed lustily. In the fields beyond the cattle lay among the deep grass, and on the Cathkin Braes the sheep were quietly grazing. Presently the sunlight stole through the cottage window and revealed an old-fashioned box-bed in which lay a mother and her new-born child. He was James Gilmour, the third son of the village joiner at Cathkin.

At that moment there seemed no earthly connection between the Mongol tending his flocks on the Mongolian plains and the unconscious babe in the humble cottage in Scotland, but God in His Heaven was already fingering the threads that were one day to join their lives with His.

## CHAPTER I

### THE HOME BY THE TIMBER YARD

The childhood shows the man  
As morning shows the day.

MILTON.

A GROUP of schoolboys romped amid the timber stacked round a sawmill. Among them, the most boisterous of the lot, was a lad of thirteen, with bright eyes and a face that beamed with fun and boyish mischief. He was James Gilmour, freed from his school tasks and enjoying to the full a game with his companions in his father's yard.

Adjoining was the two-storeyed house, with windows looking out on the Clyde valley, where the Gilmour family now had their home, for there had been changes since James first saw the light of day in the thatched cottage that stood among the

trees but a short distance along the road behind the sawmill. When he was but a child the family removed to Glasgow, where his father became partner in a timber business, but his mother's health suffered so severely in the city that it was decided to return to Cathkin. James was then five years old, and as the nearest school was at Cambuslang, two miles distant, he was nearly eight before he was able to accompany his elder brothers on their daily tramp to what was then a veritable seat of learning. A fear that he would never be able to learn and do as others did seems to have taken possession of his young mind, and it was a very timid and nervous boy that took his place on the school benches. From the first, however, with characteristic energy, he struggled with his difficulties, and with a mother who was able and willing to help him at home, soon overcame them, so much so that he rapidly progressed from one class to another. Long afterwards, when writing of these days, James Gilmour makes

a very frank but curious confession. 'I was dreadfully jealous,' he says, 'of any one who was a good scholar like myself, and to have any one above me in class annoyed me to such a degree that I could not play cheerfully with him.'

When young Gilmour reached the age of twelve he was ready for more than the limited curriculum which the Subscription School in Cambuslang could supply, and accordingly, along with his brother John, he was enrolled in the Gorbals Youths' School at Glasgow. This involved a five-miles journey morning and night, but as part of the way could be accomplished by train the boys had season tickets from Rutherglen to the city, though the two miles of rough road from Cathkin, especially in severe weather, was often something of an undertaking.

Of James's achievements at this school little is recorded save that he usually occupied the first or second place in his class, a feat that was rather difficult, seeing

that the master's favourite punishment for any little misdemeanour was to send a pupil to the foot of the class. Being naturally given to playing harmless pranks James Gilmour often found himself suddenly hurled from his proud position, and on these occasions it was with difficulty that he kept back the tears of mortification that threatened to betray his sense of wounded pride. But his lowly position only served to spur him on to greater effort, and ere the day closed he had usually regained his natural place. No doubt it was due to his diligence and success at the Gorbals School that his father decided to continue his education at Glasgow High School instead of learning a trade, a decision which James fully justified by the many honours he gained.

Clever and persevering as James Gilmour undoubtedly was, he owed much to the home in which it was his good fortune to be reared. No child could have been blessed with better parents, for the elder James Gilmour and his wife were splendid ex-



amples of those hard-working, God-fearing Scots, who have never counted any sacrifice too great if thereby their children might live honestly and uprightly before all men and courageously play their part in the battle of life.

From their forebears they had inherited an integrity of conduct and devotion to Christian principles that had won for them the esteem and trust of the whole countryside. Family prayers, night and morning, were an unfailling practice in the Gilmour home, and the most pressing claims of business were never allowed to interfere with this act of worship. On Sunday, father and mother, accompanied by such members of the family as were old enough, walked the five miles to Glasgow to attend the Congregational Church there, and in the evenings the children gathered round their mother's knee, while she read to them impressive stories from the religious magazines for children published at that time. Her comments on the teaching they

contained made a deep impression on their young minds, and her oft-expressed wish that one of her sons might yet write just such stories for their day and generation was no doubt one of the influences that actuated James Gilmour in later years. To the keenly alert mind of the boy those happy hours became a cherished memory, and long after his mother had passed away they remained with him as an abiding inspiration.

How susceptible were his feelings in those early years can be judged from an incident that he mentions in his diary, written when he had begun his life's work. 'One Sabbath,' he says, 'all were at church except the servant, Aggie Leitch, and myself. She took down an old copy of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, with rude plates, and by the help of the pictures was explaining the whole book to me. I had not heard any of it before and was deeply interested. We had just got as far as the terrible doings of Giant Despair and the horrors of Doubt-

ing Castle, when, all at once, without warning, there came a terrible knock at the front door. I really thought the giant was upon us. It was some wayfaring man asking the way or something, but the terror I felt has made an indelible impression upon me.'

On such an imaginative and sensitive lad environment was bound to have a powerful effect, and to the home influence may be traced the beginnings of the strong Christian character that was to mark out James Gilmour from among his fellows. While the benefit of the religious atmosphere by which he was surrounded cannot be overestimated, he enjoyed other advantages hardly less potent in their effects. His father, though never a rich man, by dint of hard work and frugal living, not unaccompanied by considerable personal sacrifice, was always able to supply his family with the necessities of life and facilities for a good education, while the mother, shrewd and capable, gave to her sons the boon of a

well-ordered and comfortable home. No matter how early they had to start out in the morning, she was always at her post, eager to see that they went forth after a good breakfast and well clad for whatever weather they had to face. Week in, week out, the routine of the home was maintained with clockwork regularity, and thus James Gilmour early acquired those methodical habits and the love of exactness and thoroughness that marked his career.

It must not be imagined, however, that there was anything of the prig or the pedant in James Gilmour. Even if he had had any tendency that way, it must speedily have been driven out of him by the other members of the household, for, coming midway in a family of six brothers, there was little danger of his cultivating undue self-esteem and still less opportunity for his receiving more than a just share of parental solicitude. Those daily journeys to school in the great city gave young Gilmour a certain amount of self-reliance,

and his mingling with crowds of other boys banished from him those traces of awkwardness that are often associated with the boy reared in the country.

Under such circumstances, James Gilmour, with all the joyous freedom of youth and rollicking mirth of a naturally happy disposition, passed his childhood days and entered upon the more serious business of fitting himself for a great career.

## CHAPTER II

### WINNING HIS SPURS

So high is grandeur to our dust,  
So near is God to man :  
When duty whispers low, Thou must,  
The youth replies, I can.

EMERSON.

It was a dark winter morning towards the close of 1862, and underneath the glow of a lamp James Gilmour sat at a table hastily taking his breakfast. Only his mother and himself were in the room, for the rest of the family had not yet appeared. A short time previously he had entered Glasgow University, and as the classes met at an early hour he could not take advantage of the railway, but had to walk the whole five miles to town. In consequence James had to be on the road long before his brothers, and very frequently the early start meant a good deal of hurry.

As he pushed back his chair and rose from the table his mother urged him to take more food.

‘Laddie,’ she said gently, ‘you’ll be starving long afore dinner-time.’

‘Can’t take more, Mother,’ he replied; ‘no time.’

Still she pressed him, and then in a moment the usually bright eyes became solemn, and he added, ‘Mother, what if the door should be shut when I get there?’ Something in the earnestness of the lad checked her, and she forbore to urge him further. Gathering his books together he went out into the darkness and was soon swinging down the road that led to Glasgow. The anxious mother returned to her duties, but that parting remark of her son was uppermost in her thoughts that day and for many a one to come. ‘What an unco (terrible) thing it will be if I see you shut out of heaven,’ she was wont to say to her boys as she gave a deeper and wider meaning to her student son’s words.

Young Gilmour had come to the University with a great reputation for scholarship, and it was not long before his fellow students realised that he meant to live up to it. His perseverance and power of application astonished them. Never did he seem to waste a moment, and yet in the midst of his studies he could dismiss them at once and enter whole-heartedly into any frolic that was going on. When it was over he immediately became the thoughtful scholar grappling with his problem or absorbed in his theme. And thus throughout that session James Gilmour applied himself diligently to his tasks despite the daily tramp between his home at Cathkin and the University. So little did it seem to tax his robust constitution that often he would sit far into the night preparing himself for the next day's lectures.

It was not until his second year that he became master of his own destiny and experienced all the loneliness and isolation of life at a Scottish university. With the



opening of the session he took up his abode in an untenanted house belonging to his father and situated in Cumberland Street, Glasgow. A couple of chairs, a table, a bed, and some cooking utensils were the somewhat austere furnishing of his new home. He cooked his own breakfast and took his other meals outside or in his bare room as his fancy prompted him. At this juncture his power of concentration stood him in good stead, for neither the allurements nor the temptations of a great city made any appeal to him. In the quietness of his lonely room he plodded on night after night, with the result that he attained a leading place in his classes.

But there was nothing of the bookworm about him, for he made it a rule to take adequate hours of leisure, and these he spent roaming about the city and its suburbs observing the various types of people he met, or exploring the literary and historical associations of the district whither his steps led. The great mills, the ship-

yards, the engineering works, and other industrial concerns interested him deeply, and nothing pleased him more than a visit to these triumphs of inventive skill. The absorption of knowledge of all kinds became a ruling passion with Gilmour at this time, and there were few days on which he was not able to record the discovery of some new fact or set down some new experience of the teeming life around him.

So full of interest was his life at this time that he never seemed to feel the need of companions, and though he was popular with his fellow students and mingled freely with them during college hours, he felt happiest in the solitude of his little study. At the same time, the close of the session brought him a keen sense of joy, for he was then able to return home and share again the delights and comforts of home life.

During the vacation, which lasted from April till October, he would work part of the day with his father at the sawmill and then betake himself to the woods and hills

around Cathkin, admiring their beauty and observing the variety of animal and insect life he found there. At other times he would go off by himself on some long tramp to obtain geological specimens or satisfy himself on some scientific point he had encountered in the course of his reading. His brothers never dreamed of offering to accompany him, for by this time they had learned that James enjoyed himself best when alone.

It must not be thought, however, that Gilmour was an unsociable being, or that his sojourn at college had converted him into a serious, melancholy student. It was quite the reverse, and the love of frolic and practical joking that had marked his earlier years was as much in evidence as ever. 'If we had any little infirmity or weakness,' says his brother John, speaking of James Gilmour at this period, 'he was sure to enlarge upon it and make us try to amend it, assuming the rôle and aspect of a drill-sergeant for the time being. He used to

have the mid-finger of the right hand extended in such a way that he could nip and slap you with it very painfully. He used this finger constantly to pound and drill his comrades, all being done, of course, in the height of glee, frolic, and good humour. This finger, no doubt by the unlawful use to which he put it, at one time developed a painful tumour, to the delight of those who were in the habit of receiving punishment from it. James pulled a long face, and acknowledged that it was a punishment sent him for using the finger in so mischievous a manner.'

A favourite pastime with the Gilmour boys during the heat of summer was their use of the dam connected with the sawmill as a swimming pond. James was a good swimmer, but it was characteristic of him not to be satisfied with ordinary achievement, so he conceived the idea that the power of his stroke in the water would be increased if he adopted a mechanical device he had planned. He accordingly 'made four oval

pieces of wood rather larger than his hands and feet, tacking straps on one side so that his hands and feet would slip tightly into them.' So far as we can learn the experiment was not a success, and James Gilmour was forced to admit that he could not improve on Nature's contrivances.

Those summer evenings, with their long, lingering hours of golden sunshine, sorely tried the endurance of Gilmour. He longed to be out of doors, but instead he forced himself to hard, unremitting study, and while his brothers and their friends enjoyed themselves at many a game, James sat at his attic window overlooking the fair valley of the Clyde, busy with his books. He still retained the heart of a boy and would dearly have loved to frolic in the old timber yard, but determination and adhesion to purpose were marked features of a character that was rapidly becoming strong and stabilised.

James Gilmour's last session at Glasgow University was, in many ways, an epoch-

making one for him. To begin with, his father retired from business and the family settled at Blantyre, where David Livingstone spent his boyhood. Then the house which James had occupied in Glasgow was now tenanted, and it became necessary for him to procure lodgings. It thus came about that for the remainder of his sojourn in Glasgow Gilmour shared a room with his most intimate college friend, John Paterson, who at a later date became a minister at Airdrie. He still continued his brilliant university career, but those who were in close touch with him observed a change in his whole attitude towards life. Hitherto, on religious matters he had adopted a policy of reserve. He had never obtruded his views upon his fellows, though every one knew how rigid was his code of morals and how high his ideals of personal conduct. Now, however, it was a new Gilmour that became manifest. No longer did he refrain from an outspoken declaration of his faith in a personal Saviour and

his firm resolve to dedicate his life to His service.

In those days the question of total abstinence from alcoholic liquors was not so prominent as it is now, but Gilmour, partly on account of the degradation wrought by intemperance which he had witnessed while resident in Glasgow, and partly because he felt any other attitude inconsistent in a Christian, became an ardent supporter of teetotalism, an attitude he maintained throughout his whole life. Indeed, he seems to have had a horror of intoxicating drinks, for his friend Paterson relates that ' On one occasion, perhaps for reasons of hospitality, some beer had found its way into our room ; he quietly lifted the window and poured the dangerous liquid into the street, saying, " Better on God's earth than in His image ! " ' "

Gilmour had entered the University without any definite notion as to his future career. The chance of a college education had been offered him, and his natural love

of learning prompted him to seize such an opportunity, while his shrewd common sense told him that it would prove advantageous in some way. Now, however, he regarded these years of preparation in a new light and as a fresh revelation of the Providence that was guiding his destiny. Before the session closed he had finally decided to enter the ministry, and when he received his M.A. degree he immediately took steps to secure his entrance to the Theological Hall of the Congregational Church in Edinburgh.



## CHAPTER III

### FOR THE KING'S HIGHWAY

To every man there openeth  
A High Way and a Low,  
And every man decideth  
The Way his soul shall go.

JOHN OXENHAM.

HIGH up among the wind-swept Pentlands a young man climbed the lonely path one summer afternoon. Above him the larks sang in a sky of cloudless blue, and from the fields far below came faintly the call of the curlew. As he breasted the hill he paused and turned towards the wide expanse of land and sea that opened before him. Clear in the sunlight lay the city of Edinburgh with its miles of streets and long vistas of closely built dwellings, reaching away to that historic ridge, hoary with the decaying remnants of a storied past, and crowned by the grey old castle that still

keeps watch and ward over Scotland's capital as in days gone by, while far in the distance the waters of the Forth shimmered as they broke along miles of golden sands.

But to James Gilmour standing there with the breezes blowing about him, it was not the romantic charm or wondrous beauty of the scene that was uppermost in his thoughts. He lacked neither the eye nor the ability to appreciate such a panorama of natural loveliness, but in these last days his mind had been sorely exercised with the problem of his future action. From the decision to consecrate his life to the ministry of the Gospel he had never wavered, but the question that now presented itself to him was, Where could he be of most service? Should he remain at home or go abroad? Often since he had come to Edinburgh, as he wandered along the heights or strolled by the sea-shore, the matter had recurred to him with a persistency that could not be denied, and once more it was with him that day as he stood on the hillside.

He felt the importance and responsibility of the choice he must make, and it was characteristic of James Gilmour that in his leisure hours he made it the subject of his deepest meditations. So far his stay in the Scottish capital had been one of real happiness. He had entered upon his studies full of enthusiasm, and to a trained and disciplined mind such as his was, they presented fewer difficulties than they would have done to a less well-equipped student. Added to this there was the pleasure he felt in pursuing subjects that were congenial to him, and the satisfaction arising out of his deep conviction that he was fitting himself for work of the highest kind.

There is no record of his having formed any close friendship among his Edinburgh confrères at this time, and that ability to enjoy himself by himself that had been his since boyhood, appeared to strengthen with the passing years. To none of those about him, therefore, did James Gilmour give his inmost thoughts, and few, if any, guessed

the anxiety with which he sought the way his path in life should lead. It was only after long and earnest consideration of the matter that he at last decided for the mission field, and the honesty and sincerity of purpose that marked his choice are strikingly apparent in his statement on the matter made several years after the event.

‘ Even on the low ground of common sense I seemed to be called to be a missionary. Is the Kingdom a harvest field? Then I thought it reasonable that I should seek to work where the work was most abundant and the workers fewest. Labourers say they are overtaxed at home ; what then must be the case abroad, where there are wide stretching plains already white to harvest with scarcely here and there a solitary reaper? To me the soul of an Indian seemed as precious as the soul of an Englishman, and the Gospel as much for the Chinese as for the European ; and as the band of missionaries was few compared with the company of ministers at home, it

seemed to me clearly to be my duty to go abroad.

‘ But I go out as a missionary, not that I may follow the dictates of common sense, but that I may obey that command of Christ, “ Go into all the world and preach.” This command seems to me to be strictly a missionary injunction ; so that apart altogether from choice and other lower reasons, my going forth is a matter of obedience to a plain command : and in place of seeking to assign a reason for going abroad, I would prefer to say that I have failed to discover any reason why I should stay at home.’

If James Gilmour made up his mind slowly and only after much deliberation, once his resolve was taken he acted quickly, and accordingly, before the end of 1867, he had been accepted by the London Missionary Society and admitted to Cheshunt College as a student in training for the mission field. Here the life was so different from anything he had hitherto experienced

that he felt very strange in his new surroundings, and for long after coming to Cheshunt he had serious doubts as to whether the communal life there was better than the Scottish system of living in rooms outside the college. He had never been accustomed to fraternise readily with his fellows and he had more than a fair share of Scottish independence and reticence.

It is recorded that when he arrived at Cheshunt, the senior student, according to custom, went to his room to bid him welcome and shake hands with him. 'Who are you?' asked Gilmour, rather curtly, and on being told retorted with disconcerting candour, 'And what do you want?' This was explained, and the student held out his hand. To his amazement Gilmour drew back and blurted out, 'Time eno' to shake hands when we've quarrelled. But where do you live?' 'Immediately over your head,' came the quick reply. 'Then, look here,' continued Gilmour, 'don't make a row.'

It was an ungracious response to a friendly advance, and there can be no doubt but that this brusque and uncouth youth from north of the Tweed at first created an unfavourable impression on the minds of those with whom he was destined to associate. From Gilmour's point of view, however, there was nothing extraordinary in his attitude. These men were entire strangers to him and his rugged honesty forbade him to make pretence of a friendship that was as yet non-existent. 'Dull not thy palm with entertainment of each new-hatch'd, unfledg'd comrade,' appears to have been a dictum he regarded more than the uses of convention. In the days that followed, however, Cheshunt came to recognise the sterling qualities that underlay the rugged manner of this strongly individualistic Scotsman. So far from being taciturn and stand-offish, he acquired the reputation of the cheeriest man in the College, a prince of practical jokers, and ever ready to enter heartily into the enjoy-

ment of a 'rag.' As a reciter he had few equals, and in the College debates he showed himself a racy and pointed speaker. Gilmour's many-sided character was frankly a puzzle to his fellow students, but no one ever doubted his deep piety and unfailing sincerity. It was no wonder that despite all his eccentricities of manner he remained to the group of Cheshunt men who knew him best, 'dear old Gillie.'

The same capacity for work that had marked Gilmour's university career became apparent at Cheshunt, and at the end of his first year there he was awarded the Soper Prize of £20. In addition to his college work he found time to read a number of books which, he confesses, 'gave an almost new turn to my mind and ideas of pastoral or missionary life. These books were James's *Earnest Ministry*, Baxter's *Reformed Pastor*, and some of Bunyan's works, which, through God's blessing, affected me very much for good.'

At the beginning of his second session at



Cheshunt we find Gilmour faced with a crisis. To win greater scholastic honours was something that stirred his intellectual ambition, but he doubted whether such triumphs would not be gained at the expense of his spiritual development. It was characteristic of Gilmour's honesty that he should earnestly debate the matter in his own mind, and one can imagine the struggle that went on in his soul. 'I looked back on my life,' he says, 'and saw how often I had been tempted on from one thing to another, after I had resolved that I would leave my time more free and at my disposal for God, but always was I tempted on. So now I made a stand, threw ambition to the winds, and set to reading my Bible in good earnest. I made it my chief study during the last three months of my residence at Cheshunt, and I look back upon that period of my stay there as the most profitable I had.'

This decision now manifested itself in new activities. When the day's work was

done, Gilmour would sally forth, usually alone, and conduct open-air services among the cottagers near Cheshunt railway station. At other times he would seize opportunities for speaking to labourers by the roadside or in the fields through which he might be passing. The spiritual welfare of his friends in Scotland was a matter of constant prayer, and seldom did he send a letter upon its journey without first asking God's blessing on what he had written. From this time onwards to the close of his career, Gilmour made it a rule never to undertake even the most trivial acts, without seeking the guidance of his Father in Heaven. The child-like faith of this strong, self-reliant man is one of the most moving spectacles in missionary biography. Those who heard him preach were amazed at the burning zeal that marked his impassioned appeals, and marvelled that a man, usually so reticent, should so unburden himself to those whom he sought to influence. It was evident to every one that Gilmour was deeply con-

scious of the reality of his call to preach the Gospel and had determined to prepare himself to the very best of his ability for his mission in life.

According to the practice of the London Missionary Society then prevailing, Gilmour spent the last six months of his training at Farquhar House, Highgate, where the prospective missionaries entered on a course of study suited for the particular field in which they were intended to labour.

Just prior to this Gilmour had visited Edinburgh and there met Mrs. Swan, widow of one of the pioneer missionaries to Mongolia, and the sole survivor of the little band that had been banished from the country by order of the Russian Government in 1841. She had never forgotten the Mongols, and her great desire had always been that some one might be found willing to bear the banner of the Cross through this desolate and neglected land. And just when it seemed that there was no possibility of her wish being granted, this young

man, eager for the hardest task he could find, knocked at her door. Such happenings the world calls Fate, but those with clearer vision name them God.

By the fireside of this heroic lady Gilmour heard the story of that first mission to the Mongols, and realised the loneliness of the life and the hardships to be encountered. As in a vision he saw the clusters of poor built huts on the far Mongolian plains: saw the camel trains wending slowly across the desert; watched the Mongol tending his flock or repeating his meaningless prayers; heard the monotonous chant of the lamas standing by their ancient shrines and the cry of a people hopeless in the toils of a dead faith.

A country so vast and inhabited by a wandering race, for the most part sunk in ignorance and superstition, appealed strongly to Gilmour. For nearly thirty years it had been untouched by a Christian missionary; it was difficult of access; life on the plains among the nomadic tribes

would be difficult ; their manners, customs, and language were almost wholly unknown. To many a man these obstacles would have appeared insurmountable, but to James Gilmour they formed unanswerable arguments in support of his resolution to serve God where the work was hardest and the labourers fewest.

Mrs. Swan urged the Directors of the London Missionary Society to re-open the long-neglected Mongolian Mission, and when James Gilmour announced his willingness to accept the task, they realised that in God's providence the hour and the man had arrived. A few crowded weeks at Highgate and a journey to Scotland for his ordination at the Augustine Chapel in Edinburgh, and Gilmour was ready to take the field.

' Companions I can scarcely hope to meet,' he wrote to a Cheshunt friend on the eve of his departure, ' and the feeling of being *alone* comes over me till I think of Christ and His blessed promise, " Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the

world." No one who does not go away, leaving all and going alone, can feel the force of this promise : and when I begin to feel my heart threatening to go down, I betake myself to this companionship, and, thank God, I have felt the blessedness of this promise rushing over me repeatedly when I knelt down and spoke to Jesus as a present companion from whom I am sure to find sympathy.'

Thus, strong in faith, and possessed of a noble ideal, James Gilmour went forth on his great adventure.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE UNKNOWN ROAD

I travel all the irksome night,  
By ways to me unknown ;  
I travel like a bird of flight  
Onward, and all alone.

MONTGOMERY.

EARLY in May 1870 James Gilmour landed at Tientsin, and with as little delay as possible made for Peking, eighty miles to the north, where he received a warm welcome from the missionaries stationed there. He made the London Mission his headquarters and determined for the time being to work hard at increasing his knowledge of the Chinese language, while investigating the best means of getting into touch with the Mongols. The novelty of his surroundings and the genial companionship of his fellow missionaries fired him with a new enthusiasm, and for the first few weeks all went well.

Believing that he could profit most by mixing with the people, he entered into conversation with the Chinese whenever opportunity offered, and often, when evening came, he would go out into the streets accompanied by the gatekeeper of the mission compound and some of his friends. In the company of these Chinamen he explored Peking and learned a great deal about the people and their habits, besides adding to his fluency in talking with his guides. That he did not forget his rôle of missionary on these excursions is evident from a remark he makes in his diary: 'I hope to benefit largely by this pleasant mode of study. Perhaps by this means I may be able to do them (the Chinamen) good. Lord grant it!'

His twenty-seventh birthday was celebrated while he was in Peking, and it is characteristic of Gilmour that he should have made the anniversary an occasion for a review of his position. Writing under the date June 12, 1870, he says: 'I am



twenty-seven years of age to-day and what have I done? Let the time that is past suffice to have wrought the will of the flesh. The prospect I have before me now is one of the most inspiring any man can have. Health, strength, as much conscious ability as makes one hope to be able to get the language of the people to whom I am sent, a new field of work among men who are decidedly religious and simple-minded, left pretty much to my own ideas as to what is best to be done in the attempted evangelisation of Mongolia, friends left in Britain behind me praying for me, comfort and peace here in the prosecution of my present studies, the idea that what I do is for eternity, and that this life is but the short prelude to an eternal state, the thought that after death there shall break on my view a thousand truths that now I long in vain to know—these thoughts and many others make my present life happy, and in a manner careless as to what should come.'

But that peace and happiness he was en-

joying was destined to be of short duration, for on June 22 news of the Tientsin massacre reached Peking. A Roman Catholic convent had been destroyed and thirteen French subjects killed, while the attitude of the Chinese towards all foreigners was distinctly hostile. In Peking the wildest rumours were afloat and the extermination of the 'foreign devils' was openly preached and tacitly favoured by a weak and stupid Government. It was a time of deep unrest and grave anxiety, for Europeans realised that they were living on the edge of a slumbering volcano which at any moment might become active. So threatening an aspect did matters assume that the foreign population, including the missionaries in Peking, prepared for flight, while an excited and superstitious populace waited with ill-concealed eagerness the coming of the date fixed for the 'Clearing of Peking.' A Friday was said to have been one of the two days of doom, but a terrific rainstorm in the earlier part of the week had converted

Pekin into a sea of mud, so that the Chinese in their felt-soled shoes were unable to venture forth from their houses when the hour for their arranged attack on the foreigners arrived. During the following days the situation remained as menacing as ever, but the issue of an Imperial Edict stilled the tempest of popular hate for the time. It was felt, however, that before long there would be further trouble, and those best acquainted with the state of affairs advised all foreigners who valued their lives to be ready to go south at a moment's notice.

During all this turmoil Gilmour remained perfectly calm. It was not the fear of imminent death that troubled him, but rather that his passing would still further delay the beginning of the work to which his whole being was consecrated. There is something sublime in the perfect faith that prompted him to write :

‘ While others are writing to papers and trying to stir up the feelings of the people,

so that they may take action in the matter, perhaps I may be able to do some good moving Heaven. My creed leads me to think that prayer is efficacious, and surely a day's asking God to overrule all these events for good is not lost. Still, there is a great feeling that when a man is praying he is doing nothing, and this feeling, I am sure, makes us give undue importance to work, sometimes even to hurrying over or even to the neglect of prayer.'

By the end of July there was little improvement in the situation and Gilmour was becoming very impatient, so after carefully considering the matter he finally decided on his course of action. Whether the other members of the mission party remained in Peking or went south, he was resolved to go north and by some means—he hardly knew how—reach the Mongolian plains. It was a daring decision for a man who knew next to nothing of the language of the people among whom he proposed to sojourn and still less of the hardships he

was likely to endure. 'If I go south,' he argued, 'no Mongol can be prevailed upon to go with me, and so I am shut out from my work, and that for an indefinite time. If I can get away north, then I can go on with the language, and perhaps come down after the smoke clears away, knowing Mongolian, and having lost no time.'

A strong sense of the inestimable value of time had always been a prominent trait in James Gilmour's character, and having made up his mind in this matter he at once proceeded to put his plans into execution. His first objective was Kalgan, the frontier town situated about a hundred miles northwest of Peking and lying just inside the Great Wall. It forms the gateway into Mongolia, and, once there, Gilmour hoped to make arrangements for a trip into the heart of Mongolia and if possible right across the desert to the Siberian town of Kiachta.

To reach even Kalgan, however, involved a long fatiguing journey through a country

devastated by recent floods and none too friendly to the approach of a foreigner. Undaunted by these difficulties, Gilmour made his preparations and in the morning of August 5, 1870, he was ready to set out. A Chinese chair, fashioned after the sedan model but supported in front and rear by mules, afforded him a conveyance of rather cramped dimensions, while all his worldly goods were packed in two boxes and slung across a donkey's back. With a Chinese driver as guide and a strong faith in an all-protecting Providence, he went forth on the first stage of his hazardous undertaking.

To get clear of the city and its suburbs was not an easy task, for the heavy rains had turned some of the streets into quagmires and transformed others into canals. Progress was slow in consequence and the stifling heat was not conducive to a tranquil frame of mind. No sooner had Gilmour reached the plain beyond the city and was looking with admiration on the first field of

*kao-liang*<sup>1</sup> he had ever seen, when the rear of his chair began to descend. Gilmour jumped out and found one of the mules peacefully resting on the ground. It was got into position once more and forthwith repeated its performance. After much coaxing the animal was persuaded to continue on its way, and remained on its best behaviour for the remainder of the day. Time and again, however, Gilmour records that the refractory creature brought his progress to a standstill by its desire to rest by the wayside.

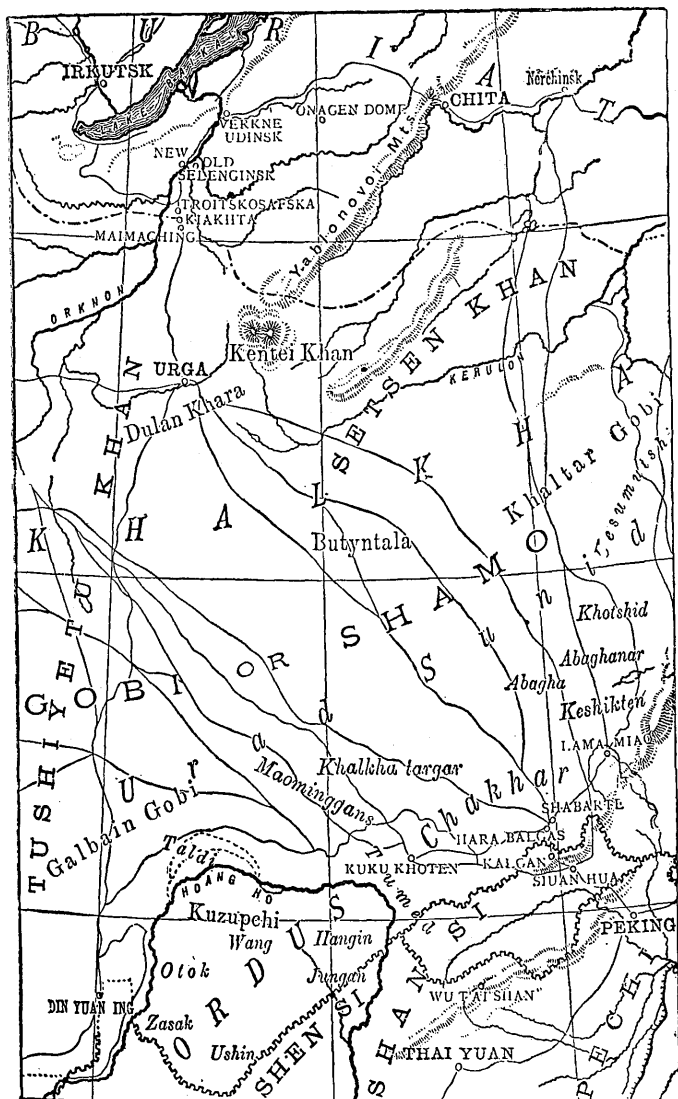
It took four days to reach Kalgan, and during that time Gilmour had many curious experiences while passing through a country that was altogether new to him. Now the road wound round the edge of a ravine ; again it would mount up through a fearsome-looking pass with frowning precipices on both sides. Sometimes the track led down through the boulder-strewn bed of an old torrent or across a region of quagmire

<sup>1</sup> A kind of tall wheat or millet.

or sinking sand. At night Gilmour halted at quaint inns, where the people stared at him as at some natural curiosity. By day he would pass under the shadow of some great fortress, showing signs of dilapidation ; perched in green nooks, oftentimes he saw little temples gleaming in the sunlight : anon a flock of sheep being driven towards Peking would block his path, or he would have to make way while a long string of Mongol camels, laden with skins, would amble past. But even these varied sights did not serve to relieve the tedium of the journey, and Gilmour, when wearied of the ever-changing panorama, would take out his road-map of ' Peking to Kiachta ' and con over the Mongol words and phrases on the margin. His slow progress proved extremely irksome to him, but he had yet to learn that he was in a land where people place less value on time than he did.

At length Kalgan was reached, and Gilmour received a hearty welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Gulick, the agents of the





MAP ILLUSTRATING JAMES GILMOUR'S JOURNEYS ON THE  
GREAT PLAIN OF MONGOLIA

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American Board of Missions. Not only did they extend to him a generous hospitality, but assisted him in every way to arrange for his journey across the desert. There was considerable difficulty in finding a travelling party at that time, for the whole country was in a state of unrest, and even from the far north came rumours of impending trouble. To Gilmour the delay was vexatious in the extreme, and his feelings alternated between hope and despair of his ever getting away. This period of waiting enabled him, however, to gain some further knowledge of the Mongolian language, though he evidently found it extremely difficult, for he says: 'To look at a Mongol word, it looks exactly like a knotted cord.'

Towards the end of August Gilmour heard of a Russian postmaster and his family who were returning to Kiachta, and it was finally decided that he should travel in their company. They were to start on a Sabbath, but the young missionary had

qualms of conscience as to the propriety of setting out on that day, so he left Kalgan on the Saturday and travelled up the ravine that leads to a pass 5400 feet above sea level and opening out on to the Mongolian table-land. Long trains of ox-carts coming down the narrow trench blocked his progress repeatedly, so that his patience became exhausted. 'The only way,' he writes, 'was for me to run up and stop the train at convenient places to let my cart come up step by step.'

By the time the summit was reached darkness had fallen, and Gilmour noted that his guide seemed bent on continuing their journey instead of halting at one or other of the inns they passed. But one light after another disappeared into the gloom, and at length the road was left behind. Suddenly the cart stopped : there was a great barking of dogs and much shouting. Gilmour looked out and found himself in the neighbourhood of a Mongol encampment. 'Just before I had been thinking of the nice hot

things I should call for at the inn and had resolved on them,' he remarks, 'when all at once I was set down in the desert beside a tent half put up, and a fire that would not light.'

It was rather a cheerless beginning, but Gilmour had already learned in whatsoever state he found himself therewith to be content. Accordingly he walked about for a time, then watched his fellow travellers cook supper in a fashion strangely new to him. 'Afterwards,' he says, 'I made tea, devoured half a chicken, and went to bed.' How Gilmour spent his first Sabbath in the desert is best told in his own words. 'Woke about 5 A.M. just as it was drawing towards light and saw that we were right out into the plain. Took a walk up a hill keeping in sight of the cart. Had peripatetic devotions. Came back, cooked breakfast and washed, and now I am writing up my diary with a lot of people looking into my cart. I have just given them a Mongol catechism and I hope it may do them good. . . . Went

in the afternoon away to the east. Had a good view and a time of devotion at a cairn from which an eagle arose as I approached. Returned to the camp and bought milk and sour cheese. Intended to make porridge, but the fire was not good on account of blowing, so I drank off my milk, ate some bread, and went to sleep.'

That night the Russian postmaster from Kalgan joined the camp, and by daybreak the Mongols were busy making preparations for the start across the desert. At first the novelty of the surroundings interested Gilmour, but the enforced inactivity sorely chafed his ardent spirit. Hour after hour the camels lurched across the sand, and far as the eye could reach was the monotonous desert stretch bounded only by the horizon. Sometimes Gilmour attempted to read, and that proving unsatisfactory, he got out and walked, to be joined occasionally by the postmaster. As neither could understand the other, their only method of communication was by means of dumb show, and not

unnaturally their attempts frequently broke down. At other times Gilmour would mount the camel of his Mongol driver, and rather enjoyed the heaving motion of the patient animal.

The length of the day's march was determined by the proximity of water, and sometimes the stage was comparatively short, but at other times it extended far into the night. Not always was the water good, and frequently it had to be brought from a well at some distance from the encampment. Even when the delay was excessive Gilmour's sense of humour did not desert him. 'What a time that water is in coming!' he writes at one point. 'That girl must be flirting with the shepherds. Did it ever occur to you that while all the fine flirtation mentioned in Genesis was going on at the well, old Laban was fuming for his supper?'

Gilmour had to do all his own cooking, and, at first, he found it no easy matter. Very often there was a strong wind blowing,

and as argol<sup>1</sup> is the sole fuel obtainable in the Gobi, to raise a good flame was extremely difficult. Tea and porridge formed his staple diet, for the supplies of mutton and fruit he had brought with him soon became exhausted and no more could be secured, so that the food problem was rather disconcerting to a man of Gilmour's healthy appetite. To make matters worse the Mongols had a habit of taking only one meal a day, and as they were continuously on the march Gilmour had no opportunity for cooking an extra meal.

Despite all the hardships of the desert journey we see him ever cheerful. The water of which his tea is made may be muddy ; he may lie awake half the night cramped up in his cart while the caravan moves forward under the eternal stars ; he may find himself with a stiff neck in the morning ; often he is desperately hungry ; it blows and it rains ; the wheels of his cart sink deep in the sand or the road is so rough

<sup>1</sup> Camel dung.



that he finds it more comfortable to get out and walk ; sometimes he is pitched out altogether, but he takes the matter philosophically, and in the midst of discomforts such as these can sing Scottish psalms and paraphrases and cheer on the camel !

Thus Gilmour made his first journey across the Mongolian desert and reached Kiachta exactly a month after leaving Kalgan. He had travelled 840 miles and gained some little acquaintance with the life led by the people whom he had come to evangelise. At Kiachta he was welcomed by Mr. Grant, a Scotsman, who was then busily engaged with the erection of certain buildings. At first Gilmour lodged at Grant's house and spent his time endeavouring to converse with the Mongolian workmen. Wherever he went he took his notebook and copied down every phrase he heard, but he found his progress was terribly slow. In vain he tried to find a capable teacher of the Mongolian language, and his want of success reduced him to the

verge of despair. Everything seemed to conspire against him, and the loneliness of his position began to prey upon his mind. His diary at this time contains entries that seem incredible for one of Gilmour's buoyant nature. For example, he writes : ' To-day I felt a good deal like Elijah in the wilderness when the reaction came on after his slaughter of the priests of Baal. He prayed God to die. I wonder now if I am telling the truth when I say that I felt drawn to suicide ? '

But Gilmour's faith rose triumphant over all his troubles and he braced himself anew for the task that lay before him. Convinced that longer residence in Kiachta would be a mistake, he set out one morning into the desert, crossed the frontier into Mongolia, determined to find some Mongol in whose tent he would live and learn the language. For some time he walked on, and then stopped at the entrance of a tent belonging to a priest whose acquaintance he had made in Kiachta. ' As I approached

the tent,' he says, ' I heard the sound of the lama's voice, and when I entered he still continued his devotions, interrupting himself only to say " Sit," and, with his hand, motion me to a seat. I sat down, and no further notice was taken of my presence for ten or fifteen minutes, when, having finished his prayers, he hastened to salute me as if I had just entered.

' After tea had been produced and we had talked some time, I told him the object of my visit, namely, that I wanted to live in his tent and learn Mongolian from him as my teacher. He was quite willing, his main difficulty being that his tent was a poor one ; he was afraid that I would freeze, and that he could furnish me with nothing better than Mongol fare, which he supposed I would not relish. In reply to his question when I would begin I said, " At once," and receiving his assent I felt that I was established as an inmate of a Mongol tent.'

It is difficult for any one unacquainted with Mongol life and habits to realise the

splendid heroism of James Gilmour in voluntarily becoming one of them in all things, save their paganism. Their civilisation was of the most primitive type, their food of the poorest, and their whole mode of existence repugnant to the ideas of those accustomed to European culture. But Gilmour strongly believed that the best way to understand a people is to live under conditions similar to theirs, and to acquire that understanding and sympathy he cheerfully accepted the lot that had fallen to him. Man in his time plays many parts, but there is no parallel to this adventurous Scot assuming the rôle of a wandering Mongol.

## CHAPTER V

### THE WAY OF THE DESERT

Only so much do I know as I have lived.

EMERSON.

THE grey light of the morning filtered through a hole in the roof of the Mongol tent, and disclosed the dim outline of a man stretched near the burnt-out embers of a charcoal fire. The flaps of his fur cap were tied down and over him rugs were piled high, so that few would have recognised James Gilmour in the recumbent figure. At no great distance from him, his host, encased in sheepskins, slumbered peacefully, while somewhat nearer the door the Mongol servant was already stirring. Outside the cold was intense, and even within the tent the temperature was far below freezing point. Presently the Mongol got into his clothes and lit a fire in the middle

of the tent. For a moment or two the interior was filled with dense smoke, but gradually it found its way out by the hole in the soot-begrimed roof and a cheerful blaze succeeded, spreading warmth all round.

By this time Gilmour was awake and could watch, as he had often done during these last weeks, the Mongol's preparations for breakfast. The pot that did service at every meal was placed on the fire and a block of ice placed within it. When the ice had melted the scum and sediment were removed,—a necessary operation, for all kinds of substances would be found adhering to the ice. Next a handful of brick tea was thrown on the surface, and as the water came to boiling point the Mongol kept stirring the mixture with a ladle. After fifteen minutes the tea was poured into a pail, the pot swept out with a wisp made from the hairs of a horse's tail, and then smeared with fat and replaced on the fire. As the fat dissolved, handfuls of meal were added

and the whole stirred until a brown and dryish mass resulted.

‘“Scotland” is ready!’ called the Mongol, and Gilmour, by this time dressed, came forward with his wooden bowl to receive a portion of the Mongolian equivalent for porridge. To them this ‘Scotland,’ as they called it, was a strange dish, for the Mongols never partook of the mixture till it was well diluted with tea. It was not a very palatable concoction for a morning meal, but from the first James Gilmour had made up his mind to be content with the same fare as the Mongols had.

For several weeks Gilmour had made this tent his home, and found himself making rapid progress with the language. The lessons he received from the lama, however, were not a success. The Mongol priest was something of a scholar and evidently considered it necessary to instruct his pupil in the stilted style of the written speech. But Gilmour wanted to acquire the colloquial,

and after one or two formal lessons from his host he decided to give up this method. Lest he should offend the Mongol, he used to take his stout staff and set off for a long walk whenever he saw his teacher making preparations for another lesson. By the time he returned the lama was busy or had forgotten all about the lesson, and Gilmour, with the glee of a schoolboy evading a disagreeable task, chuckled over his escape. Much more useful to him were the phrases he carefully copied in his notebook day by day, and as the lama was a man of some importance in the district, visitors were frequent, so that Gilmour had ample opportunities for hearing conversations carried on and making notes of all that passed. 'Exclamations and salutations made by and to persons entering and leaving the tent; remarks about and to neighbours and visitors; directions given to servants about herding, cooking, and mending the fire, were caught in their native freshness and purity and transferred to my notebook.



In the quiet intervals of the day or evening I would con over again and again what I had caught.

‘Learning the language in this way, I could soon speak a good deal more than I could understand or my teacher explain to me. . . . Thus with only a fraction of the labour I had spent over books, I soon began to feel that I was making good progress.’

In this way Gilmour acquired a knowledge of the language of the people among whom he desired to sojourn, and soon, to his joy, he was able to enter into conversation with them. He made light of the hardships and inconveniences of a life altogether new to him, and counted no sacrifice too great if through it he could enter into the native habits of thought and become intimately acquainted with their ways. As yet he had been able to do little in the way of evangelising, but he never lost an opportunity of turning a conversation into a channel that would afford an opening for a discussion on spiritual things.

Among the visitors to the tent he frequently found men of greater intelligence than their fellows, and often he was astonished at their forcible arguments. They were deeply interested in the Bible stories, but the doctrines taught puzzled them. The omnipresence of God rather staggered one Mongol lama.

‘Is God in the tent and in my boot?’ he asked. ‘Do I tread upon God? Is He inside the kettle? Does not the hot tea scald Him? If God is inside the kettle it must be living,’ and the Mongol held it up to the laughing circle of friends as a new species of animal.

‘Well,’ interposed Gilmour at this point, ‘if a fly was inside the kettle would it be living?’

‘Oh no,’ replied the lama, ‘but a fly does not fill the same space God must do.’

‘Well,’ continued Gilmour, ‘is my coat alive because I fill it?’ The Mongols were silent, for they felt that Gilmour had scored against them.

At the end of three months Gilmour's sojourn in the tent came to an end as business affairs demanded his host's setting out for Urga. He accordingly returned to Kiachta, where he hired large comfortable rooms and engaged a Mongol teacher. Strange as it may seem, he found life in the Russian town insufferably dull, and the loneliness of his position appeared once more to overwhelm him. He missed the coming and going of people and the hours of happy talk by the glow of the fire in the little tent, which despite all its discomforts was companionable.

So discomfited did Gilmour become that he determined to carry out a long-cherished desire to visit the scenes of the earlier mission, where Stallybrass and Swan had laboured for more than twenty years. Taking his teacher with him, Gilmour drove northward in a tarantass, first to Selingensk and later to Onagen Dome, where he found the mission houses still standing and a few of the old converts still alive. At

both places there was a saddening sense of desolation, and as Gilmour stood by the tombstones that marked the graves of several of the pioneer mission party, the enigma of so much toil and endurance, apparently wasted, deeply impressed his sensitive nature. With a full heart he turned away from this scene and took the road for the shores of Lake Baikal. Discarding the tarantass, he crossed the frozen lake by sleigh and duly arrived at Irkutsk. A few days' stay in this Siberian town sufficed to satisfy his appetite for further travel, and retracing his steps he once more made for Kiachta, which he reached safely early in April, after experiencing a terrific snowstorm in the Baikal region.

This short interlude had an invigorating effect upon Gilmour. Fresh scenes and a new environment had wrought wonders upon him; and at this period the entries in his diary show how severely he takes himself to task for giving way to fits of depression. He reviews his life and sees how he

has been delivered times without number when he feared some disaster was imminent. 'What should make me more happy,' he exclaims, 'than the thought of the helps and deliverances that God has vouchsafed me ; and in troubles present and to come, what can give me more faith and courage than to remember that out of such troubles I was delivered before ? '

But Gilmour very wisely did not again risk the loneliness of living in hired rooms in Kiachta, and once again we find him established in a Mongol tent, though on this occasion his stay was of briefer duration than he intended. The Mongol with whom he lived was the adopted son of a man whose tent was pitched near at hand. Father and son did not agree well, and the wife of the father saw to it that the feud lost none of its bitterness. Frequently the old man entered the tent when Gilmour was there, and as the result of his visit the missionary was able to enrich his notebook with a number of phrases which,

if they were not edifying, were at least energetic.

The quarrel between the two assumed a more serious aspect, and one night there was a great uproar in the encampment. The father had got hold of his knife and was coming to his son's tent to finish the quarrel. When the young Mongol heard the commotion he bolted from the tent into the darkness, and Gilmour, fearing that the infuriated Mongol with his knife in his hand in the small tent might mistake him for his son, did likewise. He started to run for the nearest tents, but soon became conscious that he was being followed, though whether by the irate father or the terrified son he was uncertain till he gained the shelter of a neighbouring tent, when he found that his fellow fugitive was the young man. That midnight escapade was the means of bringing to an abrupt close Gilmour's second term in a Mongol camp, for next morning the son disappeared into hiding and the father packed up

his belongings and departed for another district.

After this adventure Gilmour went 200 miles south to Urga, with the ultimate intention of returning across the desert to Kalgan. He still lacked one Mongol accomplishment. Every boy in Mongolia is taught to ride from infancy, and James Gilmour found that a grown man who could not sit astride a horse was apt to become an object of ridicule. With characteristic energy he determined he would remedy his defect in this matter, and though he could never hope to match himself in the saddle with the Mongols, who are magnificent horsemen, he felt he could at least remove the contempt they appeared to have for a foreigner who could not ride a horse.

A lama at Urga procured for him an old beast, so quiet that the aged grandmothers and very young children of the family were in the habit of riding it. When he made his first attempt the whole community

turned out to see the foreigner mounted, and, as can be understood, the spectacle gave rise to a good deal of hilarity. But Gilmour was not to be driven from his purpose by the jests of the onlookers, and he continued to persevere. He found, however, that these occasional rides did not go far to make him an efficient horseman, so he conceived the bold idea of attaining proficiency by riding across the desert to Kalgan. Six hundred miles of rough road lay between him and the Chinese frontier town, and only a man of Gilmour's courage and tenacity would have risked such an exacting journey so ill prepared.

A Mongol priest agreed to act as his guide, and with no more luggage than they could carry in their saddle-bags, the two set out. The fording of a swollen river proved the first adventure, and to a novice in the art of horsemanship the ordeal was not without danger, but by keeping close to the lee side of his companion Gilmour landed safely on the farther bank, and was soon enjoying



his first gallop across the plain. According to his contract the Mongol had undertaken that the stages would be so planned that some tent would be reached every night, but Gilmour soon found that this stipulation was to be more honoured in the breach than in the observance. The very first night darkness found the riders far from any habitation, and to make matters worse, the Mongol fell asleep in the saddle, and when he wakened he found he had lost all sense of direction. 'Where are we?' he asked. 'From what direction did we come?' Naturally, to neither of these questions could Gilmour furnish a satisfactory answer, and there was nothing for it but to unsaddle where they were and make the best of an unpleasant predicament. 'The proper way of "retiring to rest" in such circumstances,' comments Gilmour, 'is to place the saddle for a pillow, set up the saddle-bags as a screen from the wind, spread the saddle felt for a mattress, put on all warm gloves, gravats, etc., that come to hand, cover up

with any rugs you may have, and wish for morning.

‘A hungry man, it is said, dreams of feasts : I was a cold man that night, and my dream was of a nice warm bedroom with a good bed and a cheery fire. So real was the vision that I awoke saying, “If I had only had this some time ago coming from Urga !” I looked about, and saw the dim horizon over the distant mountains, heard the horses grazing near, listened to the snoring of the Mongol, and realised that we were out on the desert.’

Gilmour found, however, that sleeping in the open was not without its advantages, for later on the journey he had experience of tents that were so overcrowded with men and animals that rest was out of the question. It is a custom of the poorer Mongols to share their tents at night with the lambs and calves, for with them the tent is warmer and the inmates appear to have no objection to be licked all over by their animal friends. Even the homes of the

rich are seldom without two or three calves tethered near the door, and for a wayfaring guest to object to their presence would be regarded as an act of discourtesy.

During his wanderings Gilmour was much struck by the unfailing hospitality of the Mongols. Whenever he dismounted at a tent the 'pot and ladle' were placed at his disposal, and no remuneration was ever asked or even expected. He found also, that he fared better in the tents of the poor than in those of the rich. The wealthy Mongol was inclined to make the traveller wait his convenience and make it quite apparent that the unexpected visit was something of an intrusion, though custom forbade the refusal of entertainment to any stranger.

As Gilmour progressed southwards the journey became more fatiguing, for the fierce glare of the sun on the stones and gravel of the desert affected his eyes. He had provided against this contingency by procuring coloured spectacles before leaving

Urga, but one day his horse stumbled through sinking in a hollow piece of ground, and both horse and rider came down. Fortunately Gilmour sustained no hurt, but in the confusion that followed his spectacles disappeared, and it was not till some time afterwards that he discovered his loss. Despite these trying conditions Gilmour pushed on undaunted, and would have reached his destination much sooner had not the arid state of the desert necessitated the employment of the slower going camel in place of the horse for the last part of his ride. No rain had fallen in Gobi for a long period, and the crop of grass was so withered and scarce that it would have been impossible for horses to live on it. The route now traversed a dreary, barren region redeemed from monotony only by the presence of the far-famed stones of Gobi. 'The prevailing colour,' says Gilmour, 'was a kind of misty, half-transparent white, exactly like arrowroot or cornflour prepared with water only. Besides these

were stones of other colours, including, if I remember aright, red, green, and blue.' In other circumstances Gilmour's fondness for geology would doubtless have led to his making a closer study of the stones, but he remarks with refreshing candour: 'It was not the stones I wanted but the delicious dirty Mongol tea.' And no wonder, for he had been without food for eighteen hours!

When at length he emerged from the desert and drew near to the confines of China, Gilmour learned that his guide had never been to Kalgan before and that his knowledge of their whereabouts was as hazy as his own. So much was this the case that one night they discerned in the darkness a great black ridge rising in front of them, which the lama declared was a mountain. The coming of dawn, however, revealed to Gilmour the Great Wall of China, though his guide failed to recognise it as such.

A steep descent through a mountain pass and a perilous ride along the stony bed of

an old torrent brought the traveller to the gates of Kalgan, and ended his adventurous ride across the desert. If the journey had been hard it had been fruitful in experience. Gilmour now possessed an intimate knowledge of the life lived by the wandering Mongols ; he had studied their manners and customs at first hand and could converse freely with them in their own tongue. All that he now required to perfect his equipment for his great task was a knowledge of the written language, and that he proposed to acquire during the weeks he intended to stay at Kalgan.

## CHAPTER VI

### PEDLAR AND PILGRIM

New occasions teach new duties.

J. RUSSELL LOWELL.

ONE winter day in the year 1872 a foreigner hired a room in one of the courts of the Yellow Temple, that stands a mile and a half out of Pekin. He furnished it plainly and began to live the life of a Chinaman, 'all except the clothes and the paganism.' He was James Gilmour, making a fresh experiment to reach the Mongols and proclaim to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Before this he had tried living at the mission premises in the centre of the city, but there he soon discovered that he had few opportunities of meeting his friends from the Mongolian plains, who in the winter season came to Pekin to sell their camels and barter their sheepskins for Chinese commodities.

Roughly clad and rather uncouth, they appeared to shun the more populous parts of the city and were generally to be found at one of their great marts in the neighbourhood of the Yellow Temple. Realising this, James Gilmour had packed up his belongings, and since the Mongols would not come to see him, he was determined he would go to see them. The venture in some ways was quite a success, for when it became known that he was living in the temple court, nomads who had met him in the course of his journey, and others who had heard of him, gladly made free of his hospitality. Weary and ill at ease in a strange city, and home-sick for the sight of their wide-stretching plains, these wanderers found in Gilmour a link with the lands they had left behind. The mere fact that he spoke their language and knew their habits was a magnet that drew them to his humble abode.

His chief trouble with his guests was that they showed little interest in spiritual



things. 'Those I can catch,' he says, 'don't care a straw for Christianity. They have a system that satisfies them, and what more do they want?' At all times these Mongols were eager to discuss their grievances and tell Gilmour of all the debts they were unable to pay. They would unblushingly have made him their banker had he been soft-hearted enough to allow them to draw him on. On several occasions he did help them out of their monetary difficulties, but experience taught him that such philanthropy was worse than useless, for no sooner did these Mongols get clear of one debt than they speedily contracted another. One man asked Gilmour to lend him a shoe of silver (about £15) which was to be repaid in the spring, and when the missionary refused the Mongol kept on exclaiming, 'Heart small, heart small!' which was just another way of saying, 'Coward, coward!' The Mongol then turned the tables on Gilmour by offering to lend him a shoe of silver.

These were the discouraging aspects of the work, but, despite them, Gilmour persevered, and if he did no more at this time, he managed to keep in touch with his Mongol flock. He strove hard to interest his visitors in Christianity, but came to realise that the Mongol Buddhist is the most self-satisfied of mortals. His faith in the absolute superiority of his own religion over all others is unmistakable, and he expresses a good-natured contempt for a religion whose Sacred Book can be put in one's pocket while the writings of the Enlightened One fill hundreds of volumes.

At a later date Gilmour hit upon another plan of getting at the Mongols who frequented Peking. The pedlar of books is a common sight in China, and during one season he used to go out with two bags of books hanging from his shoulders. Wherever Mongols congregated he went and found a ready sale for his wares. For the most part these consisted of Old Testament stories and selected passages from the

Gospels, for Gilmour had found that a great deal of the Bible was quite unintelligible to the Mongols. In many places it speaks of things and places of which they had no knowledge whatever. It was one of his fixed convictions that it was a mistake to give a man of another race and religion the whole Bible in his native tongue, an opinion that has been fully endorsed by missionaries since then. 'The Bible is all very well for those who have advanced a little,' he says, 'but there is very little of the narrative portions even—the simplest parts of the book—which you can read without encountering terrible names of persons or places, or quotations from the prophets Isaiah or Jeremiah. When a Mongol comes upon these he feels inclined to give up in despair.'

Gilmour, therefore, confined himself to the selling of small books containing simple portions of the Scriptures. He usually found that would-be purchasers insisted on having the book read over to them first, in

the belief that they were thereby getting something extra for their money. Needless to say Gilmour gladly consented to this, for his reading drew a crowd and gave him a chance to explain the subject-matter of the book.

Naturally his experiences as a book pedlar were varied. Some bought his books eagerly and advised their friends to do likewise, but there were others who not only refused to buy themselves but did all in their power to prevent their neighbours from purchasing. In some cases customers had no money but were quite willing to pay in kind, and thus James Gilmour often returned to his room laden with 'a miscellaneous collection of cheese, sour curd, millet cake, and sheep's fat.'

The possibility of such work bearing fruit in days to come was ever present to Gilmour, for those Mongols with whom he came in contact came not only from those parts of the country with which he was already acquainted, but the majority had their

homes in the more thickly populated districts of Eastern Mongolia, so that the tracts placed in their hands would be carried to remote corners of the land which Gilmour could not hope to visit. 'Hoping for some good result,' he writes, 'I had my address stamped on many of the books to enable such as might wish to learn more to know where to come.'

The spring of 1873 saw Gilmour wandering among the nomads of the plains. Almost without exception he received a warm welcome and made full use of every opportunity for speaking his message. His tent was his dwelling and his chapel combined, though preaching in the strict sense of the word was out of the question, for the Mongol had never been trained to listen to any one for a minute on end. If the missionary began a sermon the Mongols started a conversation, and often interrupted him to ask questions about his dress or his country. They thought there was nothing discourteous in such behaviour,

for Gilmour discovered it was their custom to treat their priests in precisely the same fashion. When a lama entered a tent to say a few prayers, the inmates did not consider it necessary to attend to what was going on, for the simple reason that they did not understand what was being said. They felt that they had done their duty if the prayers were said in their presence.

Gilmour had, therefore, to adapt his methods to the ideas of his congregation. Two or three would drop into his tent or he would go to theirs. Conversation at first would be general, and then by skilful handling the missionary would guide it into channels that offered an opportunity for the telling of the Gospel story. In many ways these Mongols were like little children whose interest had to be stimulated before they found themselves unconsciously listening to a new and wonderful tale.

The doings of the foreigner were a continual source of surprise to the Mongols, and it was long ere Gilmour acquired a full

knowledge of their many quaint ideas. For example, very frequently after a night spent in the stifling atmosphere of an overcrowded tent he would steal away at sunrise and go for a long walk across the desert. To the Mongols this was an extraordinary proceeding, and they concluded he must be up to some mischief; perhaps in some mysterious fashion taking away the luck of their land. Again, if they caught him writing, they made up their minds he was making notes of the country's resources. If he made jottings on a road-map, it was assumed that the foreigner was preparing information for an invading enemy. Gilmour might have gone on for a long time in ignorance of the suspicion his innocent acts occasioned had not a drunken Mongol blurted out one day what everybody was saying. After that Gilmour sacrificed his morning walks and was careful to do his writing when no prying eyes were near.

Further contact with the Mongols of the plains convinced Gilmour that his useful-

ness would be greatly increased had he some more knowledge of medicine than he already possessed. Nowadays, the value of the medical missionary is everywhere admitted, but it was not so when Gilmour commenced work in Mongolia. In Peking there was a missionary hospital under Dr. Dudgeon, and Gilmour seized every opportunity when there to study medicine so far as it was possible.

‘I am told,’ he says, ‘that professional men are suspicious of giving a little medical knowledge to young men going out as missionaries. I sided with them till I came here, but here the case is different. At home it is all very well to stand before the fire in your own room, within sight of the brass plate on the doctor’s door on the opposite side of the street, and talk about the danger of a little knowledge ; but when you are two weeks’ journey from any assistance, and see your fellow traveller sitting silent and swollen with violent toothache for days together, you fervently wish you



had a pair of forceps and the *dangerous* amount of knowledge.

‘I speak earnestly and from experience. No one has more detestation than I have for the quack that patters in the presence of trained skill ; but from what I have seen and known of mission life, both in myself and others, since coming to North China, I think it is little less than culpable homicide to deny a little hospital training to men who have to pass weeks and months of their lives in places where they themselves, or those about them, may sicken and die from curable diseases before the doctor could be summoned, even supposing he could leave his post and come.’

It is not to be wondered that James Gilmour, holding such opinions on this matter, carried with him in his subsequent visits to the plains a stock of made-up medicines, suitable for the relief of minor ailments, and the success that attended his efforts justified his action. There were, of course, native doctors in abundance with

an elaborate medical system, but much of it had no better foundation than ignorance and superstition. Amongst the Mongols it was customary for the doctor to stay at the tent of a patient till he was cured or until the doctor decided that the disease was incurable, a conclusion which was very frequently reached on altogether inadequate grounds.

The insanitary mode of life among the Mongols made skin diseases unusually prevalent. They seldom changed their clothes and had the least possible acquaintance with soap and water, owing to a deeply rooted belief that if they used too much water in this life, after death they would be transformed into fishes. Again, the glare of the sun on the snowy expanses in winter and the whitish hue of the withered grass in spring and autumn were so trying to the sight, that eye troubles were of frequent occurrence. Rheumatism, however, was the most widespread complaint, due doubtless to the climatic conditions of the country

and also largely to the utter disregard of the people for the frequent changes of temperature. Gilmour found that a Mongol would not seriously consider any rational and simple precaution. He persisted in lying in a draught during the night, and could not understand why he should feel pain after reclining on damp ground. They placed much greater faith in a big dose of medicine. The more they could swallow the more convinced were they that a cure could be effected. If a man complained that certain food made him ill and Gilmour suggested that he should refrain from eating it, the Mongol thought he was being fooled.

But even when medicine was prescribed, Gilmour found that the Mongols disregarded all instructions as to its use. Usually they took too much, less frequently too little, and sometimes not at all. Strange as it may seem, there were occasions when the patient was scared at the relief he obtained, because he was convinced that the practice of such magic would bring a sure punish-

ment; or again, a sufferer might be so terrified by the lying reports of neighbours regarding the foreigner's intentions, that he would refuse every remedy.

The difficulty Gilmour had in dealing with so primitive a people is well illustrated by an incident which he describes in his book, *Among the Mongols*.

'One evening,' says Gilmour, 'when sitting in my tent door looking towards an encampment where I had given some medicine to be used after my departure, I noticed some children rush out and come straight towards me at full speed. Long before they reached me I guessed that what I had often feared had happened at last. I was not mistaken. The children came first, and after them a woman all out of breath, to say that the younger children had got hold of the medicine bottle, and, thinking it whisky, had drunk it! Finding what they had done the anxious mother had also tasted it, to see what it really was they had taken, and now they wished to know

if they as a family had poisoned themselves, and what was to be done ! Happily the medicine was not deadly, and the quantity drunk small, and no harm followed, but this incident shows a danger which has to be constantly guarded against ; and it is often difficult to heal diseases simple enough in themselves, because it would be unsafe to leave, in careless hands, medicine in sufficient quantity to complete the cure.'

As might be expected, Gilmour was often asked to do impossible and absurd things. One man wanted medicine to make him clever ; another had a desire to become fat ; a third sought a cure for hunger, while the universal request from men, women, and children was for something that would make their skins white as that of the foreigner !

Under such conditions Gilmour carried on his solitary mission amongst the wanderers of the Mongolian plains. From early spring till late summer he moved across the grass lands, and returned to

Pekin for the winter months. Never long in one place, he led the roving life of the people, enduring all the discomforts and hardships of such an existence. His needs were but little understood at home, and the inadequacy of the grant allowed him necessitated the most stringent economy. Even with that he often found himself hard put to it. 'I have walked afoot behind my caravan in the desert for miles,' he says, 'to avoid the expense of purchasing another camel,' and on at least one occasion he met the deficit on his year's account out of his own pocket.

It was only a man imbued with an intense love for his work and a strong faith in its ultimate triumph that could have carried on under so much that was discouraging and depressing. At the close of his first Mongolian campaign he wrote to a friend :

'In the shape of converts I have seen no result. I have not, so far as I am aware, seen any one who even wanted to be a Christian, but by healing their diseases I

have had opportunity to tell them of Jesus, the Great Physician.'

There can be no doubt but that Gilmour felt deeply the slow progress of his mission, and it was only his deep-rooted belief in God's power and presence that kept him from despair. After his first survey of the field he had urged upon the Directors of the London Missionary Society the need for a colleague, and though the Rev. S. E. Meech, an old college friend, had been selected as his co-worker, in the end Mr. Meech was attached to the Peking mission and Gilmour was left to plough his lonely furrow. Even to a man of his self-reliance those solitary journeys were nerve-racking experiences, and the lack of a fellow human being with whom he could share his thoughts added to the depressing environment in which he constantly laboured.

It was possibly these considerations that determined him, after much thought, to take a step that to ordinary persons might

seem quixotic. When he came down to Peking in the autumn of 1873 he went to board with Mr. and Mrs. Meech. While there he saw a portrait of Mrs. Meech's sister, Miss Emily Prankard, and became interested in the original. Often he heard extracts read from her letters, and from these judged her to be a lady of high character and deep spirituality. Pondering the matter in his mind and making it the subject of earnest prayer, James Gilmour decided to ask Miss Prankard to become his wife. Never was there a more matter-of-fact proposal or a less romantic wooing ! To his parents in Scotland he wrote : ' I have written and proposed to a girl in England. It is true I have never seen her and I know very little about her ; but what I do know is good. . . . If she cannot come, then there is no harm done. If she can arrange to come, then my hope is fulfilled. . . . '

Having dispatched the all-important letter, Gilmour set out for Mongolia, rode



about on camels and sojourned with his Mongol friends till July, when he returned to Kalgan and found awaiting him Miss Prankard's reply. Gilmour read it through calmly, put it in his pocket, and walked into the street an engaged man !

‘ My parents were scared one day last year,’ he wrote to a friend, ‘ by receiving a letter from a lady in England whose name even they had not known before, stating that her daughter had decided to become my *wife*. Didn't it stir up the old people ! They had never heard a word about it. My letter posted to them, posted at the same time with the proposal, had been delayed in London. The young lady went to Scotland and was with them two weeks, and came away having made such an impression on them that they wrote me from home to say that “ though I had searched the country for a couple of years I could not have made a better choice.” ’

## CHAPTER VII

### PARTNERS OF THE DESERT WAY

... to mine helpmate, one to feel  
My purpose and rejoicing in my joy.

TENNYSON.

IN the dark of a cold November morning two men stepped from the landing-stage at Tientsin on to the deck of a steam lighter that was about to start down the river to meet the steamer that had arrived at the bar from Shanghai. One of them was undoubtedly a clergyman, but the other, clad in an old overcoat that had obviously seen much service, and wrapped about the neck with a thick woollen comforter, might have passed for a sea-going engineer about to join his ship. As a matter of fact, however, it was James Gilmour on his way to welcome his bride from England. Surely no bridegroom ever went forth in more un-

conventional fashion than he did that day !

As the fussy little launch made its way down the stream the steamer hove in sight, just as the dawn was breaking, and in a short time those on board the lighter were able to discern the passengers on her deck. Gilmour naturally wanted to see his prospective wife, but as she was unknown to him he might have remained in ignorance of her presence had it not been for the help of his companion, the Rev. S. E. Meech, who was able to point out Miss Prankard to him.

Seeing that the tide was favourable for reaching the landing-stage, the captain was afraid to lose a minute by stopping the ship, and so Gilmour was compelled to follow in the launch, while his bride-to-be viewed her future husband under anything but favourable circumstances. What she thought of him has not been recorded, but had she been a lady who judged by outward appearances, it must have gone hard with James Gilmour, for no wooer could have taken less

pains to impress the lady of his choice than he did.

It had been arranged that their wedding would take place at Peking, and next day the young couple, accompanied by a few friends, set out for the capital. They travelled in those springless Chinese carts, which seem to have been constructed with a view to securing the minimum of comfort. Miss Prankard must have been anything but enamoured with her first experience of life in China, for at many points the road was so strewn with rough boulders that the cart lurched dangerously, and in general the waygoing was so bumpy that her time was fully occupied in holding on to the sides of the vehicle.

At night the party halted at wayside inns, strangely inadequate to one just arrived from England. The floors were of beaten earth, and in place of bedsteads there was the usual brick platform of the Chinese house. The arrival of the foreigners excited great curiosity, and often fingers

were poked through the paper windows in an endeavour to get a better look at the ' queer Western barbarians.'

It was rather an ordeal for a woman who, up to that point, had led a quiet sheltered life, but Emily Prankard had a brave heart and a cheery disposition and had come to join James Gilmour, realising that if she was to be of any service to him or to his work, she must be prepared for discomforts and hardships such as she had never known before.

A week after her arrival at Tientsin they were married, and if ever any prayers that a couple would be mutually helpful were answered, they were so in the case of James Gilmour and his wife. From the very first they seemed to adapt themselves to each other in a very wonderful way, so that it is not surprising that an unemotional man like Gilmour wrote to a friend: ' Without any gammon, I am much more happy than even in my day-dreams I ventured to imagine I might be.'

Letters in these days travelled very slowly, and Gilmour and his wife got a good deal of amusement from the missives of friends that arrived after their marriage, warning him against wedding a bride he had never seen, and an English one at that ! To one of these candid correspondents in Scotland, Gilmour replied : ‘ You need not be the least shy of me or of my English wife. She is a good lassie, any quantity better than me, and just as handy as a Scotch lass would have been. It was great fun for her to read your tirade about English wives and your warning about her. She is a jolly kind of body, and does not take offence, but, I guess, if she comes across you she will wake you up a bit.’

The year following Gilmour’s marriage was almost entirely spent in Peking, not because he or his wife desired the more congenial life in the mission compound to the wandering tent life of the Mongolian plains, but because he had to take what might be termed the unprofessional work

of the hospital while Dr. Dudgeon was on furlough in England. Occasionally he varied this routine work by a trip to one or other of the fairs at large centres within reach, in company with the agent of the National Bible Society of Scotland, when the two would vie with each other in friendly rivalry as to who would sell most tracts and books.

But though Gilmour faithfully discharged all his duties at this time, there can be no doubt but that his heart yearned for the Mongols. That this was so is plainly evident from the efforts he made to arouse among his friends in Peking an interest in the nomads of the plains. To this end he erected his Mongol tent in the mission compound and invited five or six at a time to dine in Mongol fashion. The fire was lit in the centre of the tent and felt mats spread on the ground. When the hour for the meal arrived Gilmour placed the pot on the fire and boiled the mutton, taking it out with the tongs and laying it on a board.

Each guest was provided with a clumsy-looking knife but no fork, and had to hack off, as best he might, a piece of meat sufficient for his requirements. While the first course was in progress, a handful of millet was thrown into the water in which the mutton had been cooked, and after it had boiled the necessary time, the soup thus prepared was ladled out into wooden bowls kept for the purpose, and the meal proceeded.

Gilmour was wont to declare that he had never tasted any preparation in civilised cooking so delicious as this millet soup, but it is to be feared that his guests did not share his appreciation, and that the primitive feast, as a whole, did not commend itself to their more fastidious palates as it did to 'the Crusoe of the Mongols.' Indeed, on one occasion a reverend gentleman, when called upon, refused to ask a blessing on the meal, apparently feeling that what he was expected to swallow was something on which it was hardly worth asking a blessing !



The return of Dr. Dudgeon to Peking left Gilmour free to resume his work among the wandering Mongols, and accordingly, in the spring of 1876, he set out once more. No colleague had been secured for him, but, with a bravery and a consecration beyond all praise, Mrs. Gilmour determined to accompany her husband. No doubt he had some misgivings on the matter, for it was a hazardous undertaking to venture into the strange and primitive existence of the Mongolian plains with a lady brought up as Mrs. Gilmour had been. Life in the mission compound at Peking was a totally different thing from sojourning in a tent in Mongolia. The hardship and privation of such a journey and the distasteful environment in which she was sure to find herself, might well have furnished a valid excuse for her remaining behind. That she did not do so is proof, not only of her wifely devotion, but also of her intense desire to do her part in winning the Mongols to a love of Jesus Christ. Her share in her

husband's wanderings forms one of the most interesting pages in the annals of missionary heroism. It is no wonder that Gilmour said of her: 'She is a better missionary than I.'

On this occasion Gilmour took with him two tents of coarse blue China cloth, lined on the inside with the commoner white. His intention was that one of the tents would serve for Mrs. Gilmour and himself, and the other for their servants. Among the Mongols, however, there is no such thing as privacy, for they are in the habit of going into each other's tents freely and at all times, so that Gilmour and his wife soon found out that if they wished to avoid offending the people they must keep an 'open house' in the most literal sense of the term. At first it was rather embarrassing to find strangers sitting by when they were at their meals, their devotions, and even when performing their ablutions, but one becomes accustomed to little discomforts, and soon the missionary and his

wife came to regard the presence of curious and interested Mongols as a matter of course.

For one thing, this constant mingling with the people enabled Mrs. Gilmour to pick up the language very rapidly, and, more important still, it created a feeling of confidence and established such friendly relations between Gilmour and the Mongols that they speedily came to regard Gilmour and his wife with feelings of affection. They were different from all other foreigners whom they had met—more accessible, less distant, and so wholly unselfish that the untutored Mongols marvelled how it came to pass that this stranger and his wife, in their desire to be of service to them, should choose to dwell among them. Their lives were certainly shining examples of practical Christianity, and no more devoted servants of the Cross ever went about ‘continually doing good.’ Despite the powerful spell that Buddhism exerted over the people of the plains, they were compelled to admit

that a religion that made men and women act as Mr. and Mrs. Gilmour acted, was something worth possessing. But tradition was strong among the Mongols and prejudice hard to break down, so that while the lives of the pioneer missionaries undoubtedly paved the way for the coming of the Gospel to Mongolia, the fruits of their strenuous labours were long in being gathered.

As the great majority of the Mongols could neither read nor write, Gilmour found that brightly coloured pictures, portraying Bible scenes, were best suited for his purpose, and many a time his tent was crowded with eager listeners, fascinated by the revelation of a new faith. When he came across an educated Mongol he gave him an illustrated tract, and generally found that the man read it with interest, while a copy of the whole Gospel left him mystified. Very patiently Gilmour would explain the difficult passages, and then an argument would start. As it proceeded all in the

tent would gather round, and for hours the talk might go on, since time is of little concern to the roving Mongol. If a lama were present he was always ready to argue, and invariably sought to prove that Christianity was quite superfluous because many of the virtues extolled by Jesus Christ had their place in the teachings of Buddha. They were in thorough agreement with the doctrine that 'whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,' but that Christ by His death could deliver men from sin seemed to the Mongols something too good to be true. That Christianity had no set liturgy, which had to be learned by rote and repeated day by day, astonished them; and that the Gospel was free to all, learned and unlearned alike, was an idea that upset all their preconceived notions of religion. This and many other misunderstandings Gilmour found it hard to remove, and while the people were quite ready to hear his message and debate it with him, they showed little disposition to

cast off the shackles of their age-long traditions.

Among such a people, isolated and interdependent as they were, existence was well-nigh impossible in face of the social boycott that would inevitably have followed any revocation of the Buddhist faith, and thus many who might have embraced Christianity were held back from doing so by dread of the consequences. It can therefore be readily realised how hard and unpromising was the task to which Gilmour and his wife had consecrated themselves.

Of the perils encountered by Mr. and Mrs. Gilmour in the course of their wanderings, volumes might be written. Now we see them in the midst of a furious tempest, struggling to load down the ropes of their tent with bags of earth, or piling up a strangely assorted barricade to shelter them from the blast. The wind shrieks about them with demoniac fury, rending the canvas and snapping the ropes like thread. Anon it is the rain, pouring and

lashing and roaring, that beats around their frail habitation. Within there is the spray, shaken like pepper from a box, soaking everything. Both sit huddled in their rain cloaks or, spade in hand, contrive to dig channels for the pools of water that threaten to overwhelm boxes and bedding.

Again, it is a thunderstorm, the fiercest that Gilmour had ever encountered. Lightning darted hither and thither across the sky ; the thunder roared and rattled, and above the din and confusion came the unmistakable noise of rushing water. Gilmour ventured out into the night and found on either side of the tent a raging torrent. Fortunately it stood on a slight elevation, but foot by foot the water rose till all round was a foaming sea with every avenue of escape cut off. Nothing could withstand the force of those madly rushing waters, and if once they gained the tent all must be swept away. To Gilmour and his wife sitting there praying for deliverance the

passing of an hour seemed an eternity. Towards midnight the storm abated, and once more Gilmour peered into the darkness. The flood still raced wildly past, but he noted with joy that the waters were creeping back. He crawled into the tent again to cheer his anxious wife and wait for the breaking of the day. When morning dawned all danger was gone, but as husband and wife surveyed the scene they saw how perilously near to death they had come, and realised afresh the protecting power of Him Who guided their destiny.

On another occasion they nearly lost their lives in their efforts to restore the sight of a man who was rapidly becoming blind. Gilmour found him suffering from cataract, and rightly concluded that a surgical operation alone could save his sight. He accordingly made arrangements for the patient being sent the long journey to Peking to be treated at the hospital there, undertaking to pay all expenses. The



man belonged to an encampment where Gilmour had been received with a considerable amount of suspicion and even hostility, and he naturally hoped and prayed that a successful operation would engender confidence and establish friendly relations between him and these Mongols.

The homeward journey, however, was one long chapter of accidents. The patient and his companion encountered dust-storms and scorching heat, so that when he was brought back to Gilmour and the bandages removed he was found to be stone blind. The missionary and his wife were in serious danger for several weeks, but bravely determined to live down the evil things that were said against them. 'I know why the foreigner sent our brother to Peking,' said the Mongol who had accompanied the sufferer on his journey, 'for I saw the jewel of his eye in a bottle on the shelf. These Christians can get hundreds of taels for these jewels which they take out of our eyes.' To James Gilmour it was a heart-

breaking experience, but only one of the many disappointments he encountered in the course of these journeys.

These and many similar experiences fell to the lot of Mr. and Mrs. Gilmour in the course of their wanderings, and one can quite understand that when they came down to Peking for the winter seasons, they found in the mission compound there a veritable haven of rest.

Such a life was strenuous enough for a man of Gilmour's robust physique, and it is not surprising that its anxieties and privations told heavily upon his wife's constitution. She had made three trips to Mongolia with her husband, but by the end of 1880 it was clearly evident that the rest and change of a visit to Britain were absolutely necessary if she was to regain her strength. Gilmour's furlough, however, was not yet due, and his wife was unwilling to return without him. She accordingly remained in Peking while he continued his mission to the Mongols or assisted in the districts

around the capital. By the spring of 1882 he was ready to take his well-earned holiday, and, accompanied by his wife and his two young boys, he set sail for the homeland.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN THE HOMELAND

The old familiar faces  
And the healing hills of home.

BEXLEY HEATH is twelve good miles from London, and over forty odd years ago, when travelling facilities were fewer, there must have been few men prepared to undertake the long tramp over dusty highways for the sole purpose of attending a church service in the city, and yet one fine Sabbath morning we find James Gilmour swinging along the road with the keen zest of a man who feels himself in tune with his environment. His strong Sabbatarian views never permitted him to travel by rail or omnibus on that day, and added to that was his strong love for the open country. The glorious freshness of the morning, the

beauty of the ever-changing landscape, and the singing of the birds about him had a fresh charm after these long years on the sun-parched plains of Mongolia, and thrilled him with a new sense of the wonder and beauty of God's creation. Mile after mile went by and at length he drew near the great city.

It had long been Gilmour's cherished desire to hear the famous Charles Spurgeon at the Tabernacle, and for this particular Sabbath a seat-holder had presented him with a card of admission. To his great delight he found himself close to the platform and heard what he describes as 'a good, earnest sermon,' being afterwards introduced to the great preacher. The afternoon he spent at the Stockwell Orphanage, and then set out on his return journey. When he reached Lewisham it was time for the evening service, so he took the opportunity of hearing Morlais Jones before continuing his homeward journey. Afterwards he walked home in the moon-

light, thoroughly delighted with his achievement.

Such a strenuous day was characteristic of James Gilmour, and if he had had his will he would have spent many a Sunday in similar fashion, but throughout the whole of his furlough it was seldom that he had a respite from pulpit duties. A great deal of his time was taken up with the fulfilment of engagements arranged by the London Missionary Society, and these, thanks to his strong constitution, Gilmour invariably carried through. Everywhere he went, throughout England and Scotland, he made warm friends, and by his graphic descriptions, drawn from his missionary experiences, did much to kindle afresh the enthusiasm of the Church for foreign missions. It was not that his oratorical gifts were of a high order, but men and women realised the intensity of his convictions and his absolute sincerity, and these things impressed them more deeply than any story he had to tell. A less

conscientious man would have improved the occasion by colouring an incident and adding to its dramatic possibilities, but Gilmour's strict regard for the truth and nothing but the truth, restrained him. His modesty in relating episodes in which he was the chief actor deprived the public of hearing many a thrilling tale. People often wanted to hear what James Gilmour had done, but James Gilmour insisted on telling what God had done. It was only to a little circle of friends in some manse study that he would at times unburden himself, and then his hearers were made to understand the heroism of his lonely struggle against fearful odds.

But what could not be wrung from Gilmour in pulpit or on platform came out in another way. When he arrived in England he brought with him a large quantity of manuscript detailing his twelve years' life and experience in Mongolia. His diaries had been written for the information of his relatives in Scotland and his reports

on his work for the benefit of the Directors of the London Missionary Society. In addition to these he had recorded many incidents and set down vivid impressions of places and people he had seen, so that it needed but a little effort of memory to recall them in all their original freshness. Those who had seen his writings were strongly of the opinion that they should be published, but Gilmour disliked the idea of such publicity. When it was pointed out to him that Mongolia was then practically an unknown country to most people and that anything he might have to say about it would be the means of creating an interest in this somewhat neglected field of missionary enterprise, he set his scruples aside. Anything that might help the mission to his beloved Mongols he would do, and accordingly he set himself to prepare the material he had for publication. No one was better qualified than he to write about Mongolia, for at that time his knowledge of the country and its people was greater



than that of any European living. The result of his labour was the issue in the spring of 1883 of the now famous book, *Among the Mongols*.

Few books of missionary enterprise have made such a wide appeal as this one, and it is curious to note that thousands of readers to whom James Gilmour was not even a name and who had no interest whatever in his work, were charmed by the novelty and freshness of these descriptions of Mongol life. Missions and missionaries in those days, even more so than now, were apt to be regarded as the hobby of well-meaning but effeminate people and the diversion of impracticable dreamers. But here was a virile man, daring and venturesome to the last degree, practical to a fault, full of all the shrewdness and common sense of his race, and yet a missionary. Men were compelled to recognise that the writer of *Among the Mongols* was neither fool nor visionary, and that any enterprise that claimed the allegiance of such as he deserved to be

spoken of with respect. Thus Gilmour's book fulfilled a double purpose in that it gave the English-speaking public a first-hand account of Mongolia, and at the same time created a deeper respect for the cause of foreign missions.

The outstanding quality of the book was the writer's power to make real what he described, and one eminent reviewer in the *Spectator* compared it to *Robinson Crusoe*. 'Robinson Crusoe has turned missionary,' he says, 'lived years in Mongolia and written a book about it. That is this book . . . Mr. James Gilmour, though a man of whom any country might be proud, is not a deep thinker, and not a bright writer, and not a man with the gift of topographical, or indeed any other kind of description. He thinks nothing extraordinary and has nothing to say quotable. There is a faint, far-off humour in him, humour sternly repressed ; but that, so far as we know, is the only quality in his writing that makes him *littérateur* at all. But Heaven, which

has denied him many gifts, has given him one in full measure—the gift of Defoe, the power of so stating things that the reader not only believes them, but sees them in bodily presence, that he is there wherever the author chooses to place him, under the blue tent, careering over the black ice of Lake Baikal, or hobnobbing in tea with priests as unlike Englishmen as it is possible for human beings to be, yet, such is his art, in no wise unintelligible or strange.’

Such criticism naturally attracted editors keen to secure the services of a writer who could strike a fresh note, and Gilmour might have found ready employment for his pen, but beyond contributing some papers to the *Sunday at Home* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, he refused all other offers. He was firmly convinced that it was not his duty to spend time in writing when it might be devoted to more strictly missionary work. That he had distinct leanings towards a literary life is evident from references he makes to the subject at later

periods in his career. Thus we find him saying : ' I feel keenly that there is here more than I can do, and writing must go to the wall.' Again, several years later, he comments : ' I could have made, and could now make, I believe, money by writing, but I do not write. I settle down to teach illiterate Chinamen and Mongols, heal their sores, and present Christ to them.'

Once before James Gilmour had been tempted to aim at academic distinction to the detriment of his training for the missionary field, and there can be little doubt that the lure of a successful literary career was an even more subtle temptation in view of all that he had already endured. But in neither case did he yield, and cheerfully made the sacrifice duty demanded of him. If the world of letters lost a second Defoe, the kingdom of Christ gained a second Paul.

The last part of his furlough Gilmour spent among his friends in Scotland, and one of the happiest memories of that blissful

time was his sojourn during June and part of July 1883 at Millport, the well-known watering-place on the Clyde. A trip to the neighbouring island of Arran afforded him ample opportunity for indulging his propensity for long walks and lonely expeditions. On one occasion he met with an adventure which might well have ended his career. To climb Goatfell, the highest point of the island, is the ambition of nearly every visitor to Arran, and Gilmour started late one afternoon, determined to make the ascent. He missed the track and consequently found his progress slow and his way impeded by rough boulders, but he finally succeeded in reaching the summit just before sunset. After surveying the wide expanse of land and sea that unfolds itself from this lofty height, Gilmour prepared to descend. He had not gone far when he was overtaken by a dense fog, a phenomenon of frequent occurrence in Arran at that season of the year. In a short time the whole island became en-

veloped in its fold and it was impossible to distinguish the nearest objects. To make matters worse a fierce thunderstorm, accompanied by a deluge of rain, broke out. Gilmour well knew that to move a step under such conditions was fraught with the gravest peril, so he wisely sat down under the lee of a dripping rock, and wrapping his plaid about him, prepared to spend the night as well as he could. He tells us how the hours dragged slowly on as he sheltered there in the cold, benumbing fog till the day broke and there was light enough to make it safe to continue his descent over the rocks and stones that strewed his path. After many hours he reached home none the worse of his vigil on the mountain side, though residents told him he was fortunate to be alive after such an adventure.

Despite his many public engagements, the change of scene and the greater comfort he enjoyed had made a new man of Gilmour. The weeks he had spent in Scotland had braced him for new tasks as nothing else

had done, and when he returned to London to make final preparations for his voyage to China, his friends realised that he had regained all his old buoyancy and enthusiasm. He had been particularly struck by the robust evangelistic methods of the Salvation Army and admired the way in which they went 'headlong for Christ.' It was quite evident to those who saw him then that Gilmour was bent on a more intensive campaign and was resolved that his invigorated manhood should be yet more devotedly spent in the service of his Master.

Full of hope, and inspired by the thought that many in the homeland were praying for his success, he sailed for the East and was back in Peking by the middle of November 1883.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MINGLED CUP

And light is mingled with the gloom  
And joy with grief.

WHITTIER.

IT was winter on the Mongolian plains and the rough track was crusted with frozen snow. Making his way with difficulty, James Gilmour trudged along, a strange, solitary figure on that desolate waste. Across one shoulder was slung a postman's brown canvas bag, which contained his kit and his provisions, while from the other hung an angler's waterproof bag, filled with books and tracts. His folded sheepskin coat was fastened to a rough stick which he carried on his shoulder, and thus equipped he marched steadily northward.

A few hours before he had left the last inn on the edge of the plain and started on his





JAMES GILMOUR EQUIPPED FOR HIS WALKING EXPEDITION  
IN MONGOLIA IN FEBRUARY 1884

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journey, to the amazement of the inn-keeper, who considered the foreigner mad to attempt such a venture on foot. But James Gilmour was not to be deterred, for he knew that this winter tramp was his only chance of seeing his Mongol friends for some time to come, since it had been arranged he was to remain in Peking while the Rev. S. E. Meech was home on furlough. There were several Mongols whom Gilmour wished specially to visit, for they had shown signs of interest in his message and his whole being was stirred with a great desire that they should accept Christianity. He knew he was taking risks in making such a journey under the prevailing conditions, but these weighed as nothing with him compared to the furtherance of the spiritual welfare of the people to whom he had dedicated his life.

Hitherto he had travelled on a camel or in a cart, but at this particular season of the year there was little pasture for animals, and, in addition, he intended the tour to be

of such short duration that it was not worth while to cumber himself with a tent and other baggage. Besides, since his return from Britain he had never felt himself more fit to endure fatigue or undertake exacting toil.

But Gilmour had under-estimated the difficulties of the way, and unaccustomed to such a long tramp, he soon found that his feet became badly blistered, so that he could only go forward with increasing pain. The few travellers whom he met asked the usual questions as to where he was going and what was his business, refusal to answer which would, in Mongolia, create the gravest suspicion as to the traveller's honesty. His answers astonished the wayfarers, for respectable strangers were invariably well mounted and well equipped. Never before had they encountered a foreigner limping along with all his belongings hung about him, and this uncouth figure puzzled them so that they could only gaze at him and murmur 'Strange affair,' as they passed

on and left Gilmour to pursue his lonely and painful journey.

He had covered nearly twenty miles, but found the last stage of his march almost beyond endurance, and it was only by taking frequent rests and an occasional bite of snow that he was able to proceed. At last the cluster of tents that marked his destination came in view and Gilmour gathered his failing energy for a final effort. As he approached the encampment the dogs rushed out in savage fashion to attack him, as Mongol curs always do whenever they sight a stranger. Gilmour gave the usual shout that brought the people to their doors to call off the dogs, and in a few minutes he had found shelter in one of the tents. Its owner was the mandarin of the district, and with true Mongol hospitality the teapot was produced and passed round. Says Gilmour: 'I had intended to drink tea in his tent only for form's sake, but his tea was good, the snow seemed only to have increased my thirst, the man himself

was sincerely friendly ; under the circumstances my stoicism broke down, and the mandarin's teapot was soon all but empty.'

Meanwhile the news that ' Our Gilmour ' had arrived spread round the encampment, and soon the tent was crowded with old friends, all of whom expressed great astonishment that a foreigner should have been able to visit them on foot at such a season. After a rest Gilmour went on to some of the other tents, and finally made up his mind to stay the night in the mud-built hut of a Buddhist priest whom he knew. When he arrived the lama was making a vain attempt to light a fire, but all he succeeded in doing was to fill the place with smoke. As he persevered with his task Gilmour told him he had come to talk with him and other friends about Christianity. The priest said little, but presently he was joined by a blackman, as a layman is termed in Mongolia, and as the two puffed and blew at the obstinate flame, the lama repeated to the newcomer what the mis-

sionary had been saying. Both were invisible to Gilmour, so dense was the smoke, but he became intensely alert when he heard the blackman, Boyinto by name, declare that for months he had been a Jesus scholar, and that if the priest would join him they would become Christians together. The priest, however, would not commit himself, but the layman was emphatic, and whether the lama joined him or not he had made up his mind to accept the religion of Jesus Christ.

A thrill of joy passed through Gilmour as he realised that here at last was the first fruit of his labours, and for the moment the smoke-laden tent became transfigured. 'I was lying flat on the platform,' he writes. 'I could just see dimly the bottom of their skin coats, but the place was beautiful to me as the gate of heaven, and the words of the confession of Christ from out the cloud of smoke were inspiring to me as if they had been spoken by an angel from out a cloud of glory.'

Gilmour was naturally impatient to have a private talk with Boyinto, but, strange as it may seem, Mongolia, despite its wide spaces and scattered population, is one of the most difficult places in the world to secure privacy. If one shuts his tent door and keeps out all comers, he is suspected of hatching plots; if he takes a man for a quiet stroll, he is sure to be charged with casting an evil spell over his companion. Gilmour had, therefore, to find some definite business that would give him an excuse for being in Boyinto's company alone. He accordingly arranged that the Mongol should return with him to the inn whence he had set out to bring back certain small presents he had left behind. Thus to all inquirers a feasible and perfectly truthful explanation of their journey could be given without raising any suspicions. That walk back to the wayside inn was to Gilmour the most pleasant pilgrimage he had ever made in Mongolia, though at the same time, by reason of his blistered feet, the most painful.



As Boyinto told his story and recounted the growth of his belief in Christ, James Gilmour seemed to forget that he was foot-sore and weary, and at a lonely part of the way both knelt down and poured out their feelings in prayer. There was much the Mongol wished to know and many difficulties that had to be cleared away, but that was a task in which Gilmour rejoiced. The man needed help and guidance, and the big, brotherly heart of James Gilmour was stirred to its inmost depths by the appeal of this seeking soul from the desert wastes.

When Gilmour reached the inn he could hardly walk another step, and realised that he must use a cart when his feet became troublesome, if he was to continue his tour. He accordingly bargained for the use of one with the innkeeper, who was not slow to tell the foreigner that he would have saved much time and labour had he acted in this rational manner at first. Next day Gilmour and Boyinto drove back with the presents

and had another opportunity for a long talk. After a good rest at the encampment Gilmour started afresh on his round of visits, sometimes driving and sometimes walking, chiefly the latter, owing to the difficulty of obtaining food for his camel. For three weeks he wandered about among the Mongol encampments for miles around, being much cheered by the friendly welcome he received, though brief entries in his diary tell something of what he suffered. Again and again occur the words, 'Feet terribly bad,' and the picture of the heroic missionary marching across the desert, sometimes with the snow swirling about him, or picking his painful way over the slippery stones, reveals the almost martyr-like devotion of James Gilmour to his life-work. Only a man imbued with the highest sense of duty, and fired with a zeal to win souls for his Master, could have endured all he did on this and many other occasions.

On his return to Peking in April 1884, Gilmour threw himself heartily into the

work of the mission there, which, during the absence of the Rev. S. E. Meech, was left practically in his charge. From six in the morning till ten at night he was at the service of all who came to him, spending much of his time in dealing with individuals. When opportunity offered he preached to the crowd, but the habit of addressing himself to small groups, acquired, doubtless, during his sojourn among the nomad Mongols, continued to be his favourite method. So engrossed did he become in his work that he forsook all his books except the Bible, and it he studied more closely than ever. Indeed, as Gilmour grew older he relied more and more upon the old Book for stimulus and inspiration. 'Keep sucking at your Bible,' was the expressive phrase he once used when writing to a relative in Scotland. At this time he seems to have lived a life apart from the world, for he gave up reading all newspapers unless those that were distinctively Christian in their character, and even ceased to attend

the Sunday evening English service, in order that he might have more time to devote to the Chinese. To James Gilmour the world appeared well lost, and there were occasions when the claims of his wife and family took second place. Some may find it hard to justify Gilmour's utter disregard for the affairs of everyday life, yet it must be remembered that he undoubtedly felt himself divinely chosen for the task he had undertaken, and nothing but a whole-hearted devotion to it would satisfy his conscience.

But the shadow of a coming sorrow was creeping over his life, though at first his deep absorption in his work hid it from him. For several years Mrs. Gilmour's health had not been good, and while her visit home had in some measure restored her former vigour, she had not long returned to Peking when the old symptoms of lung trouble recurred. There can be little doubt but that her self-sacrificing journeys with her husband to the Mongolian plains, and the hardships she

there endured, sowed the seeds of her last illness. For long she tried to remain brave and cheerful for her husband's sake, but those who were in constant touch with her saw clearly that she was gradually becoming weaker. So long as she could she continued her work among the women and children of the district, but by the summer of 1885 she reluctantly had to relinquish all outside duties and husband what little strength remained to her for her home tasks. 'I am unable to do anything except the children's lessons and the harmonium on Sunday sometimes,' she confesses rather sadly, and in letters to friends there are touching references to her failing strength and her regret that her days of usefulness are nearing an end.

As yet the truth had not dawned on James Gilmour, for, busy from early morning till late at night amongst the Chinese, he failed to note the many signs of his wife's waning energy. At length, however, her serious condition impressed itself upon him,

and in his diary under the date July 4, 1885, he writes : ' It really dawns upon me to-day in such a way that I can feel it, that my wife is likely to die, and I too feel something of how desolate it would be for me with my motherless children sent away from me.' From this time onwards there are many references which show the calmness and resignation with which husband and wife regarded their coming separation and reveal their unflinching faith and perfect confidence in the ways of an all-wise God.

While loving hands smoothed the sufferer's pillow, Gilmour, outwardly the same patient man, went on with his work, but in the firm, set lips and drawn face there was evidence of the deep waters through which he was passing. He spoke but little of his trouble to any one, but many a night he sat through the long silent hours by the bedside of his dying wife. Often she slept but little, and it was during those wakeful periods that they discussed the

future of their children and the deeper things of life. The end came at midnight on September 19. Two days later Gilmour buried his brave comrade in the Chinese city she had learned to love, and returned to his desolate home. He was left with three boys, the youngest of them only thirteen months old.

When Mrs. Meech returned from England she took charge of the infant boy, but the two elder lads Gilmour desired to keep with him as long as possible. 'The laddies are here with me now,' he writes, 'and I am both father and mother to them. To-night I darned their stockings for them before they went to bed.'

Gilmour had many friends in Peking who would gladly have performed such services for the motherless boys, but to the stricken man there was a strange comfort in taking their mother's place. He knew how soon they must pass out of his keeping, and treasured, as with miser care, every hour he could spend in their company.

Six months after his wife's death the inevitable parting with his boys arrived. It had been decided that they should return to Scotland to live with an uncle, and on a March morning the bereaved father took the two eldest boys to Tientsin and placed them on board a steamer bound for Britain. What his feelings were only those who have experienced such a separation can tell. With tear-dimmed eyes he watched the vessel drift out into mid-stream, and saw, as in a mist, the two little figures on the deck waving their handkerchiefs in farewell. At length the ship disappeared round the bend and Gilmour turned sorrowfully away. The old life was gone for ever, and henceforth he was to journey in ways that were new to him and along pathways that were untrodden. For the rest of his life he was destined to be a homeless wanderer bearing aloft the banner of the Cross among a people that were strange to its message.



## CHAPTER X

### 'WHERE THE STRANGE ROADS GO DOWN'

A strong man :

For where he fixt his heart, he set his hand  
To do the thing he will'd and bore it thro'.

TENNYSON.

To a little village in the heart of Mongolia there came one day a foreigner accompanied by a Mongol. It was bitterly cold and a snowstorm was brewing, but that did not deter the curious inhabitants from crowding the long narrow street. Here was a stranger on foot, tired and worn-looking as from a long journey. Who was he? they asked of one another, and what did he want? No one could answer these questions, but presently the traveller raised his voice and told them of One, Jesus Christ, who had come to the world and died to save men from their sins. They had never heard such a message before, but it was an inter-

esting story and excited their wonder. With benumbed hands the stranger drew from his bag some little books which he offered for sale. From their pages they could learn more of Jesus Christ if they cared. At first they held back, and then one or two of the bolder bought a book, while their neighbours crowded round to see what it contained. The stranger watched them narrowly, as if to read in their faces what were their thoughts. Some laughed outright and considered this foreigner must be a madman ; others were frankly puzzled and slipped the books into the folds of their loose dress, determining to read the strange tale at their leisure.

And so, up and down the village street that cold winter day James Gilmour wandered, seeking to find an audience who would listen to his story. The threatening snow commenced to fall in earnest, and soon the air was thick with heavy flakes. The Mongol, who carried Gilmour's and his own bedding on his back, urged retreat to an

inn, and thither Gilmour bent his steps, but the landlord eyed him suspiciously. Only beggars arrived on foot, and he felt sure his other guests would object to the presence of this strange pair. 'I am a respectable innkeeper,' he argued with himself. 'My customers are honest men and could not mix with such disreputable company.' So Gilmour was turned away. Another inn was tried with the same result, and there was nothing for it but to seek the shelter of the house where the beggars and thieves had their abode.

James Gilmour had been inside many queer places and mingled with strange company in the course of his travels, but the surroundings in which he now found himself were the most squalid and vicious he had experienced. His companions were the outcasts of society, most of them thieves, some of them robbers from the highways, and all of them degraded. But to this ardent missionary of the Cross such things were to be expected, and so, far from

complaining, he gloried in the opportunity that was afforded him of befriending the man who was down and out. He had set out on this journey, knowing full well that he would be exposed to new dangers and have to suffer fresh privations, for the district to which he had come was regarded as unsafe for a foreigner, and no missionary had ever before chosen it as a field of operation.

But it was just the kind of place James Gilmour would choose, for his practice had always been to seek the loneliest and hardest corner of his Master's vineyard. After the death of his wife he had seriously considered the advisability of a change in his scene of action. The nomads of the plains were too few in number and too scattered to occupy him continuously. Besides, it was borne in upon Gilmour that the American Mission at Kalgan was, to a certain extent, reaching the Mongols in that area, and he was not the man to continue in a field in which others might be use-

fully employed. Accordingly he had paid his last visit to the plains and decided henceforth to concentrate his energies on Eastern Mongolia, a large tract of country to the north-east of Peking, inhabited chiefly by Mongolian farmers and their Chinese servants. There were many large towns and innumerable villages in this great territory, and to its people James Gilmour determined to carry the Gospel.

At an earlier date he had made a brief survey of the region and satisfied himself as to its possibilities. He was very anxious that a medical man should be sent as his companion, but at the time this was not possible, so he set out alone into this vast field with nothing more to uphold him than an unshakeable faith and perfect reliance upon God. 'God has cut me adrift from all my fixings,' he says pathetically, 'so now I feel quite ready to go anywhere if only He goes with me.'

Gilmour's early experience of journeying on foot through this new region convinced

him that if he was to be of any use he must attain respectability in the eyes of the people. It was a distinct disadvantage to be regarded as a wandering tramp, but he soon learned that this disability could be easily removed. He found that the passport to a higher social status could be secured by the possession of a donkey, so a donkey was bought. Gilmour rather enjoyed the humour of the situation, for all the use he made of the animal was to carry his baggage, but it furnished him with the necessary credentials of respectability, and that was all he wanted.

As he walked from place to place his feet often caused him much pain, but he seems to have possessed the dour determination of his race not to be conquered by physical handicaps.

‘At night,’ he writes, ‘I used to draw a woollen thread through the blisters. In the morning I “hirpled” a little, but it was soon all right. I walked, not because I

had not money to ride, but to get at the Mongol who was with me.'

Such a sentence as that last reveals the intense earnestness of the man. To be thrown into the company of any one meant for Gilmour an opportunity of saving a soul. That could not be missed, no matter what the discomforts were to himself. Again and again this trait in his character shows itself, and his diaries contain many references to instances where he upbraids himself for not improving the shining hour of a chance acquaintance.

Gilmour was now able to make use of the Chinese inns in the course of his journeys and found it easy to get into touch with the Mongols and others who frequented these. But he was not satisfied that he was using his time to the best advantage. Everywhere he went he found large numbers of the people requiring medical treatment, and such knowledge and remedies as he possessed he was always willing to place at their service. He soon discovered,

however, that many were averse to coming to his inn for treatment. They were very suspicious of the foreigner and what he might do to them behind the windows of his lodging. Their friends increased their uneasiness by telling them weird and wholly imaginary stories of the things the stranger might effect. By many he was regarded as a dangerous man, capable of bewitching trusting folks and casting all manner of evil spells upon them. In the open street they had less fear, for there all could see what was being done, and so Gilmour determined that if the people would not come to him he would go to them.

He had noted in one of the towns he had visited a Mohammedan medicine seller, who did a thriving trade under a little cloth tent, so James Gilmour resolved to follow his example. 'It was with fear and trembling,' he says, 'that I set up my tent for the first time at a great fair.' At first patients were few, but gradually the people gained confidence and the news of the cures he effected



by the use of simple remedies made a great impression. To prove that his medicines did no harm, he would sample them before the crowd, to their great amusement, after the manner of a quack.

The poverty of the people with whom he came in contact greatly distressed Gilmour, and he considered it inconsistent with his vocation that he should permit himself any luxuries in the matter of dress or food. In order that he might become as nearly as possible one of the people in outward things, he adopted the dress of a tradesman and became a vegetarian, even giving up eggs, carrots, and leeks in accordance with Chinese ideas. It was no uncommon thing for him to take his bowl of porridge, native fashion, in the street whilst sitting on a low stool beside the stall of some itinerant vendor. His midday meal, partaken of at the commonest restaurants, consisted of a few coarse Chinese cakes and tea; his evening one of bean-curd and dough-strings, flavoured at times with rank vegetable-oil

so repugnant to Western palates. His outlay on food never exceeded threepence per day, and often he refrained from even this poor diet in order that he might spend the time in fasting and in prayer. 'I have felt it my duty,' he says, 'to become a vegetarian on trial. I don't know whether or not I can carry it out. The Chinese look up so much to this supposed asceticism that I am eager to acquire the influence a successful vegetarianism would give me, and I am trying it in true Chinese style, which forbids eggs, leeks, carrots, etc. As far as I have gone all is well. I am a little afraid that the great appetite it gives may drive me to eat till I become fat.'

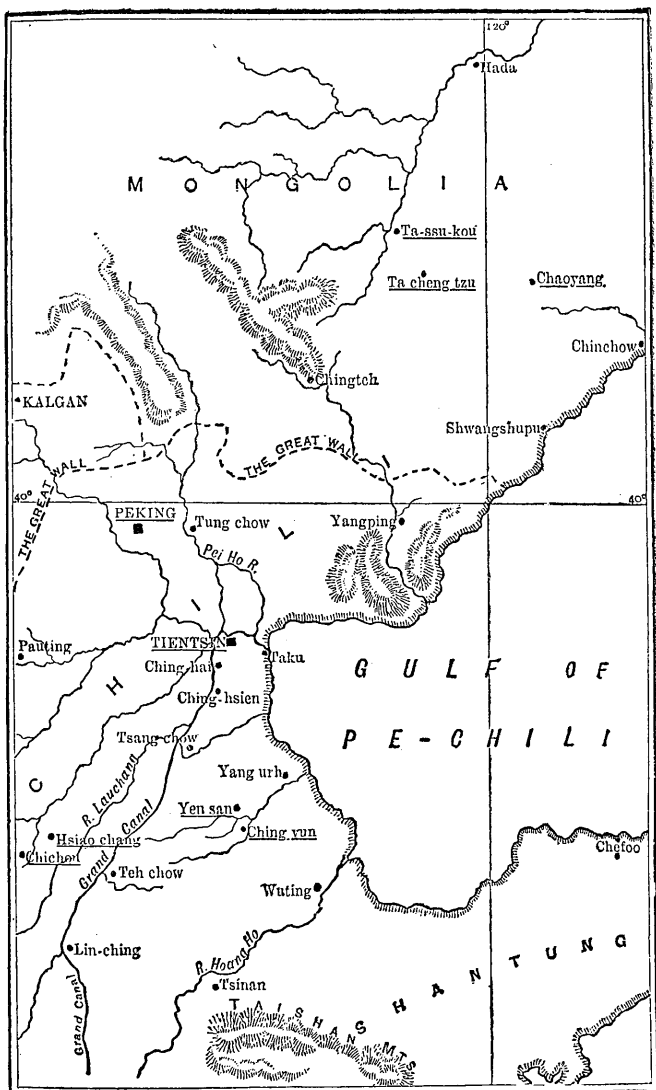
Such rigorous self-denial may seem almost fanatical and savouring of self-righteousness, but those who knew Gilmour best have testified that there was not a trace of such things in his being. His whole aim was to increase his usefulness, and if the surrender of any personal comfort tended towards that end, Gilmour cheerfully made the

sacrifice. It was, perhaps, only natural that his colleagues in Peking and elsewhere did not altogether approve of his methods and contended that he was risking his health and efficiency by such a life, but he always urged that they could not competently judge of a situation of which they had no personal knowledge. The conditions in Eastern Mongolia were totally different from those prevailing south of the Great Wall, and we may be quite certain that a man of Gilmour's keen observation and shrewd intuition was justified in pursuing the course he did. Not only that, but he believed, even on the lower ground of economy, he ought to live as he was doing. The divergence of opinion regarding his actions more than once constrained him to set forth his reasons in striking fashion. Thus he wrote to the home officials of the London Missionary Society :

‘ It is the foreign element in our lives that runs away with the money. The foreign houses, foreign clothes, foreign food, are

ruinous. In selecting missionaries, physique able to stand native houses, clothes, and food should be as much a *sine qua non* as health to bear the native climate. Native clothes are, I believe, more safe to health than foreign clothes ; they are more suited to the climate, more comfortable than foreign clothes, and so dressed, a Chinese house is quite comfortable. In past days I have suffered extreme discomfort by attempting to live in foreign dress in native houses.'

That his Christ-like life was not without its effect upon the people, is borne out by an incident that happened in connection with the conversion of some men in the town of Tá Chêng Tzŭ. About six months before Gilmour had entered a restaurant there, and during dinner a half-drunk Chinaman had spoken slightly of him and charged him with crimes, which, though they might have been true in respect of some other foreigner, were certainly absolutely without foundation in Gilmour's case. During the time this torrent of abuse was



MAP ILLUSTRATING JAMES GILMOUR'S LABOURS  
IN EASTERN MONGOLIA

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being poured upon him Gilmour never uttered a word of protest, but went on with his meal, after which he paid his bill and returned to his inn. It was only later that he learned that his patience, as the Chinese called it, had been an important factor in impressing these converts with favourable ideas of Christianity. 'Another thing that seems to have impressed them,' he confides, 'was their seeing me this August, day by day at my post in my tent, carrying on the work, when they knew I was ill, and, according to their ideas, ought to have been in bed.'

While he had a certain measure of success amongst the Chinese of the district, Gilmour found it hard and discouraging work to influence the Mongol population. There was little return for all the energy expended, but the dauntless faith of a heroic soul triumphed over all disappointments. The loneliness and magnitude of his task sometimes appalled him, and often when he looked across a crowded market-place at

some great fair, he felt the futility of his efforts. All around him surged the careless throng with no higher aim than to extract the maximum amount of pleasure from all that was to be seen and heard. Gambling tents were everywhere ; jugglers performed amazing feats to bewildered crowds ; peep-shows held the young spell-bound ; itinerant vendors of all kinds of goods shouted themselves hoarse, and amid all the din and confusion, almost hidden in the motley gathering, stood the cloth tent of the foreigner, resting on its six bamboo poles, and flying in front the sign that proclaimed to all that this was ' The Jesus Religion Gospel Hall.' Beneath its folds Gilmour offered his medicines for sale and patiently endeavoured to gain a hearing for the Gospel story. Curiosity, more than anything else, attracted the crowd, and they seemed greatly amused when he extracted a tooth or anointed a patient's eye, but when he began to preach they moved away to something that was more to their liking.



When they did stay it was usually to ask how they could have good luck with their harvest, and Gilmour used to astonish them by asking if they thought they deserved good harvests. This was a view of the situation that had never occurred to them till Gilmour pointed out that their poverty was not due to lack of crops but to the misuse of what they grew. Everywhere he went he saw waving fields of barley, but it nearly all went to the neighbouring distilleries, while great tracts of land that might have been used to grow food were set apart for the cultivation of tobacco and opium.

From his earliest years Gilmour had been a stern opponent of the use of strong drink in any form, and while he admitted the comparative harmlessness of smoking, he was convinced in his own mind that it served no useful purpose. It was to be expected that he would denounce strong drink on moral and utilitarian grounds, but as tobacco growing was a menace to the food

of the people, he was no less emphatic on the necessity for its abolition. The evil of opium was something that needed no words of his to condemn, for every one freely acknowledged its baneful influence. His hearers quite admitted the force of his arguments, and some agreed that they were largely responsible themselves for the shortage of food in time of drought, but habit and custom are strong links in the chain of life. So deeply did Gilmour feel on the matter, however, that for several years he made abstinence from drink, tobacco, and opium an indispensable condition of admission to church membership. In this he was not at one with his brethren in the mission field, but he maintained firmly that, even if Christian principles allowed any modification of his demand, local conditions did not permit of any less rigorous enforcement of his views.

After eleven months' constant journeying over a district extending roughly to a hundred miles, Gilmour went down to

Tientsin for a few weeks, where he was the guest of Dr. Mackenzie. During all these months he had never met an European nor heard his native tongue spoken. Letters had only reached him at infrequent intervals and he knew little or nothing of what had been happening in the outside world. He had lived the life of an itinerant preacher and medicine vendor, visiting country fairs and making longer stays in the larger towns like Tá Chêng Tzŭ, Tá Ssŭ Kou, and Ch'ao Tang. For the most part he had been compelled to find accommodation in wretched inns and had consorted with all kinds of people. Of hardship he had endured quite as much as any experienced in the Mongolian plains, and of danger considerably more. But he had come through it all strengthened in faith and determined to do yet greater things for God and man.

On his arrival at Tientsin Gilmour rejoiced to find that his recently appointed medical colleague, Dr. Roberts, was already there, though it had been arranged he was

not to go up to Mongolia till he had more acquaintance with the language. But Gilmour, who had waited so long for a companion, was well content to wait a little longer, so he went off to Peking with Dr. Mackenzie, happy as a schoolboy, all his troubles for the moment forgotten. 'I am glad to know more of him,' wrote Dr. Mackenzie. 'He is a delightful companion. Living away in Mongolia he sees no foreign face, and no fellow countryman is there to sympathise with him. He has no house of his own, and, living in the wretched inns of the place, knows nothing of privacy, for the Chinese and Mongols, according to custom, crowd round him at all hours. He takes simple medicines that I make up for him, and opens a booth on the street, where he gives away his medicines and preaches the Gospel to those who come around him. It is a hard life, but God has given him much grace and strength to bear it.'

## CHAPTER XI

### A HEART IN EXILE

Who best  
Can suffer, best can do.

MILTON.

THE city of Tá Ssŭ Kou lay bathed in the sunshine of an April morning in the year 1888. Long shafts of golden light struck against the gleaming walls and pierced the paper windows of a house in which two men sat. One was James Gilmour and the other his new colleague, Dr. Roberts, who, barely a month ago, had reached Tá Ssŭ Kou. As yet his knowledge of the language was limited and Gilmour insisted that he should devote the mornings to his studies, while the older missionary followed his usual practice of taking up his stand in the market-place. Every day in fine weather, when the sun reached a certain spot,

Gilmour took up his medicine-boxes and his tent and sallied forth. As he did so on this particular morning his heart was filled with joy. His long-cherished wish to have a congenial companion to share his labours had been fulfilled, and as he stepped into the glorious sunshine of this fresh spring day he felt that all was well.

Arrived in the broad market-place, Gilmour erected his tent, and soon the usual crowd gathered round him. He sold his medicines, attended to his patients, offered his books for sale, and preached to those who were willing to listen. That morning the throng seemed more dense than usual, and towards midday he noticed a man pushing his way through the crowd, intent on reaching his table. On his shoulder he carried a bundle and under his arm he carried a sword wrapped in a cloth. 'Excellency,' said the man as he came forward, 'I am a courier from Tientsin.' His face was very grave and Gilmour wondered what message he had brought.

Leaving his tent in charge of one of his native helpers, Gilmour led the man into a quiet street and demanded his news. He groaned but gave no answer, and Gilmour became alarmed, fearing that his carrying a sword meant that there had been another massacre in the south. 'Speak thy message,' again demanded Gilmour.

'O Excellency,' began the man tremblingly, 'Dr. Mackenzie is dead after a week's illness.' Gilmour bent his head in sorrow and walked slowly to his house, followed by the courier.

The news was broken to Dr. Roberts, and then the two men took the letters from the courier's bundle. Gilmour's letter confirmed the sad tidings, and in a little Dr. Roberts looked up from the missive he was reading. 'Gilmour,' he said, with a tremor in his voice, 'I am appointed in Mackenzie's place.'

Both were silent for a space, and then the truth slowly forced itself upon James Gilmour. Mackenzie, one of his closest

friends, was dead, but this was not all. The colleague for whom he had prayed and waited so long, and in whose coming he had had such pleasure, was to be removed. Somehow the sunshine that flooded the sky was darkened and the brightness of that April morn had grown dim. No keener blow could have fallen upon Gilmour at this juncture, and at first his faith reeled under it. It was all so inexplicable, so utterly at variance with what seemed best.

‘Forty-eight hours have elapsed,’ he writes, commenting on the incident, ‘and I am just coming right again. I have been like a ship suddenly struck in mid-ocean by a mountainous sea breaking over it. . . . My faith is not gone, but it would be untrue to say that I am not walking in the dark. I shall do my best to hold on here single-handed, but I earnestly hope I am not to be alone much longer. Something must be done. There is a limit to all human endurance.’

But in the months that followed Gilmour’s



capacity to endure was to be still more severely tested. For a time his work, instead of going forward, seemed to be more barren of results than ever. His native converts, whom he had begun to trust, failed him on more than one occasion, and others, who had professed anxiety to learn something of Christianity, seemed to regard his simple goodness as a sign of weakness, making it easy for them to take advantage of the lonely foreigner. One man who had made professions of friendship stole a much-valued copy of the Revised Version. 'I had much difficulty in procuring that Bible,' says Gilmour, 'and wasn't it heartless of a Chinaman to steal it for the leather binding, for which even he could hardly have any use?' On another occasion one of his converts got hold of his bank-book and robbed him of about £3. When discovered he expressed his penitence and Gilmour put him on probation for a year rather than report the matter to the authorities. Gilmour's Chinese helpers

could not understand why he did not invoke the law, and even threatened to desert him if he was to do nothing more than pray about the matter. The little band of local Christians considered he should have shown his power to punish the culprit, but Gilmour gently waved aside their contention though the whole affair perplexed him, more especially as the theft became known in the town and gave those who scoffed at the foreigner's religion a further opportunity of jeering at it.

These and many other losses Gilmour bore cheerfully, refusing to speak about them lest it might hinder his usefulness and prejudice him in the eyes of the people. To add to his troubles he could get no suitable premises for carrying on his mission, and the ceaseless strain of his daily toil in the market-places and at country fairs began to tell upon his physical strength. Writing at the close of 1888 he confesses that his eyes are bad, his heart is weak, and he has

developed a cough. 'Don't be alarmed, though, and don't alarm my friends,' he writes with characteristic thoughtfulness. 'The above is for your own private information and guidance.' His diary dealing with this period contains many references to his fits of depression, and it is easy to read between the lines that the cause was as much physical as mental.

In his loneliness Gilmour derived much comfort from the letters he received from his boys in Scotland. With fond care he bound them into a little volume that he carried in his pocket wherever he went, and often in some desolate Mongolian inn he would take them out and read them again and again as if to satisfy in some measure his starved love for his absent children. Very touching are the letters that Gilmour wrote to his motherless boys about this time, and they reveal as nothing else does the wonderful tenderness of Gilmour's heart. The baby brother who had been left with the Meechs in Peking had died,

and the father writes telling his boys how mother and child lie in the same grave. 'Mamma's and Aleck's coffins touch down below. They lie together. But Mamma and Aleck are not there. . . . My boys, don't be afraid of dying. Pray to Jesus, do the things He likes, and if you die you will go to Him, to His fine place, where you'll have everything that is nice and good.'

Again he is describing something he has seen in the course of his journey—a festival or an incident at a fair. Anything and everything that he thought of interest to his boys he jotted down. One letter of this nature may be quoted: 'I am doctoring a little homeless lad's head here. I put an ointment all over it to-day. He cried. I said I had medicine that would stop the pain and brought out six cash—one farthing—and told him to go and have a bowl of buckwheat meal strings. All laughed; he stopped crying and did not seem to feel the pain after that. Most of the people in the

town are much impressed with the improvement in the boy's head. When he came I rubbed on ointment with my finger. The bystanders were much pleased to see I was not averse to touching the poor dirty lad's sore head. Jesus touched a leper, and I like to do things like what Jesus would do.'

The earlier letters of the series were printed in big capitals so that both boys might be able to read without difficulty what Gilmour had written. Rough but effective sketches of persons and things he had seen conveyed an even clearer impression of what their father had endeavoured to describe. Again and again he expresses his earnest wish that both should grow up Christian lads. 'You, Jimmie, know Jesus,' he writes in one letter, 'does Willie? Teach him. Mamma is not here to teach him and I am far away. You are his big brother. Teach you him like a good laddie, as you are.'

To the uncle to whom he had confided

the care of his boys, he says : ' I wish them to be Christ's from their youth up. I wish them to get a good, thorough education, not too expensive, to be able to read, write, and spell well. Should either of them turn out likely, I might be able to let both, or that one have a college education, but I don't want either of them to go there if they don't show adaptation for it.

' What I want of you is something money cannot buy, motherly and fatherly care in Christ for the desolate lads whose whole life, in time and eternity too, may largely depend on how they are trained and treated during the next few years. I am not rich, but I can support my boys. This Christian care and love, however, is what is not to be had for money, so I beg it.'

Such a passage displays not only a deep solicitude for the welfare of his children, but reveals the noble ideals of the man. It is not wealth or position he desires for his boys, but goodness of character and the ability to serve faithfully their day and

generation. Surely a desire that should find an echo in the heart of every parent ! We are, moreover, helped to appreciate to a greater extent the sacrifice Gilmour made to accomplish his life work. His thoughts were ever with his motherless boys, but his sense of duty was too strong to make him desert a post that by so doing he might be at their side.

Indeed, there were times when he thought that his love for his boys and care for their future hindered the progress of his work and tended to a lack of faith. Ever since his wife's death he had been in the habit of sending home to his old father in Scotland such sums as he could spare to be laid aside for the education of his sons, but during his lonely sojourn in Eastern Mongolia he became rather troubled over the accumulation of even the small amount he could call his own. Day by day it was borne in upon him that he should devote the money to the advancement of God's kingdom and leave the future of his boys in his Heavenly

Father's hands. As he went about he was continually urging the natives to become Christians, and when they hesitated, because such a step meant the loss of all their worldly goods and the scorn of friends, Gilmour would entreat them to place their trust in God, Who would care for them as He did for the beasts of the field. It therefore seemed inconsistent that he should appeal thus to the Mongols and Chinese and yet lack that same trust in respect of the future of his boys.

He tells us that the thought so possessed him that he could neither read his Bible nor pray. 'Entrust that money to My keeping,' a voice seemed to whisper to him by night and day, and Gilmour felt that he must give heed to its command. The result was that he made an anonymous donation of £100 to the funds of the London Missionary Society and a further £50 to be spent for widows and orphans of missionaries.

At a later date, however, he seems to



have felt that he had kept back a part, and that not until he made a full surrender of all his savings could he find peace. We thus find him writing to his father, shortly after Dr. Roberts was taken from him, and at the time when his feeling of failure was deepest and the outlook for the future blackest, asking that a sum amounting to several hundred pounds should be sent out to Pekin and banked there. 'This is no sudden resolution,' he writes; 'I have thought and prayed much about it. I can delay this step no longer without feeling I would be refusing to follow God's guidance. I feel, too, that God has so many ways in which He can bless the lads and me, that in making this arrangement I am running no risk. The only thing I am not quite clear about is the detailed disposition of the money. Meantime, it seems to me that I can best use it for God in this mission here.'

Doubtless this action will seem to many the result of his isolated position and great

mental depression, while others may see in it further proof of that unworldliness and idealism that earned for him the reputation of an eccentric dreamer. The fact seems to be that Gilmour was so far above ordinary mortals in faith and spirituality that we cannot fully appreciate his attitude. If ever there lived on earth a man who sought to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ to the last letter, it was James Gilmour, and that conclusion must serve to silence the criticism of lesser souls.

For nearly a year after Dr. Roberts left Tá Ssŭ Kou Gilmour battled on in the face of fearful odds, and it was not until March 1889 that Dr. S. T. Smith, his new colleague, reached Mongolia. Dr. Smith, recounting his arrival, tells how a dust-storm had been blowing all day and that in consequence he hardly expected Gilmour would be able to meet him as arranged, but about four o'clock in the afternoon he turned up, tired and dusty. 'I had pictured quite a different man to myself,' says Dr. Smith, de-

scribing his first meeting with Gilmour. ' I saw a thin man of medium height, with a clean-shaven face, got up in Chinese dress, much the same as the respectable shopkeepers in that part of the country wear. On his head was a cap lined with cat's fur. I was struck by the kindly but determined look on his face. He greeted me most cordially, and I remember he said, " I am glad to see you." He looked worn out and ill. I at once gave him his letters.

' After arranging his things and seeing his men comfortably settled, and getting over his first interview with the Christians there, he came up to my room in order to spend the night with me. We sat to all the hours of the morning chatting about things at home, and about his boys, whom I had seen before leaving Scotland.'

It did not take the practised eye of Dr. Smith long to discern that Gilmour was bordering on a physical collapse, and that unless he had an immediate rest and change of scene the consequences would be serious.

At first Gilmour was reluctant to quit his post, but when Dr. Smith pointed out to him the danger of permanent disability he gave in and at once set out for Pekin. There Dr. Smith's opinion was fully corroborated, and in less than a fortnight Gilmour had sailed for home.

'There are many kinds of heroism,' says Richard Lovett in his monumental biography of James Gilmour, 'but it may be doubted whether any touches a higher level than that exhibited by this patient sower of the seed of life on the sterile field of Mongolia, bravely continuing to do so until imperatively urged to cease for a season, not by his consciousness of failing power, but by the alarm and influence of his medical co-worker.'

## CHAPTER XII

### WINNING THROUGH

Say not the struggle naught availeth,  
The labour and the wounds are vain.

ARTHUR H. CLOUGH.

Two men sat in a room overlooking the garden that brightens the sombre aspect of the north-eastern corner of St. Paul's Churchyard in London. As they talked a knock came to the door and a head appeared. 'Just a minute,' called one of the men, and for a space the two continued their conversation. Presently one of them rose and went out, while the stranger who had knocked entered. For a moment the other man looked at him. He had an idea that he knew the face but could not recall where he had seen it. Then a smile broke over the face of the stranger and he burst into a laugh.

‘Why, man, you don’t know me!’ he exclaimed.

‘Yes, I do,’ returned the other as recognition dawned upon him. ‘You’re Gilmour, but I thought you were in Mongolia at this moment.’

It was no wonder that this old-time friend failed to recognise in the pallid features and spare figure the strong and buoyant James Gilmour, who had sailed away six years before. Even the long voyage from the East had not sufficed to dispel the haggard and weary appearance which his Mongolian experiences had effected in Gilmour.

After their first greetings were over and Gilmour had explained the reason of his sudden appearance in England, the two went out into the crowded street and threaded their way through the maze of London’s ceaseless traffic. Soon they passed beyond the noise and bustle of the great city, and Gilmour found himself carried off to the quiet, comfortable home of his friend. Arrived there his tired look

seemed to vanish, and as he began to talk his eyes kindled and his face glowed with pleasure. It was no use telling the returned exile not to overstrain himself, for he was so full of his work and experiences that nothing would restrain him, so far into the night the reunited friends chatted, while Gilmour spoke of the past and his hopes and plans for the future.

In vivid pictures he painted his life in Mongolia. He recounted adventures at wayside inns and on lonely roads, how he had been protected from robbers and escaped the perils of floods ; he repeated conversations with travellers he had encountered ; retailed incidents in the market-places of the towns he had visited. So dramatic was the effect of his words that the listener sat entranced and seemed to live through the scenes depicted. In his intensity of feeling Gilmour forgot that he was a sick man, and his whole being responded to the uplift of a new enthusiasm.

In the weeks that followed Gilmour's health rapidly improved and he found his time fully occupied by visits to relatives and in renewing old friendships. He had many requests to address large missionary gatherings, and whenever possible he cheerfully acceded to the calls made upon him. Wherever he went his utterances made a deep impression, and those who had known him in the old days detected an even deeper earnestness in his words. Sorrow and suffering had made their mark upon him and he had lost much of the brusqueness that characterised him in former years. He exhibited a greater tenderness for the weak and wayward, and to hear any one speak evil of another pained as much as if the wrong had been done to himself. A visit to his old college at Cheshunt gave him an opportunity of pleading the claim of Mongolia for more workers, and as a result of his moving appeal Mr. J. Parker decided that when his studies were completed he would join Gilmour in the Mongolian field.



But undoubtedly Gilmour's greatest happiness during his eight months' sojourn in Britain was found in the society of his two boys. He spent as much time as he possibly could with them, and during the summer had a glorious four weeks at Millport. Here they had boating and walking to their hearts' content, and Gilmour seemed to renew his youth as he frolicked with his sons. For Gilmour the place had sad memories too, for he recalled the happy days he spent there on his last visit home when his wife was with him. Both he and his boys spoke quite freely about their dead mother, and the uppermost thought in all their minds was the certainty of reunion in the land beyond. Gilmour had no doubt about it himself, and he always encouraged the lads to think of their mother as only separated from them for a time. That he felt his loss more than ever was often apparent to those who watched the wistful tenderness that stole upon him when he tried to act the mother's part to the boys.

Once he heard of a medical missionary who had brought his wife home from China to die, and remarked, as if recalling his own agony: 'Eh, man, he little knows the *terrible* dark valley he has to come through, and if Christ is not with him he will be undone!'

Whether at home or abroad Gilmour could never rest from the labour of evangelisation in any and every form, and it is related that while at Millport he used to slip out of the house at midnight and paste up texts on every place likely to catch the eye. No one knew who did it, till one day his sister accidentally came upon him making preparations for his after-dark ramble. When remonstrated with for risking his health in the night air he expressed himself as sorry to cause any one pain on his account, but plainly indicated that he believed he was doing God's work.

Whilst staying at the old home in Hamilton he would go for a walk through the streets on a Saturday evening and note

the number of religious meetings going on. 'Just think!' he would say on returning, 'in a little town like this there are men preaching at every other street corner, and I am alone in all these hundreds of square miles in Mongolia! What you people are thinking of I cannot imagine!'

All too soon the brief, happy furlough came to an end; the day of his parting drew near. Never before had he felt so reluctant to drag himself away from the family circle, and when his sister spoke hopefully of his return he shook his head sadly and replied, 'I shall see your face no more.' The day before he left he rose from the dinner-table before the others and went out. Presently they saw him looking wistfully through the window at the happy group, and then with tear-filled eyes and quivering lips he turned away. On January 9, 1890, he embarked at Tilbury and by the middle of March was back in Peking.

Whilst Gilmour was in Britain his work

had been carried on, as far as possible, by his native helper, Mr. Liu, and some of the converts, while Dr. Smith had paid two short visits to the district, the first by himself and the second in company of the Rev. T. Bryson of Tientsin. Wherever they went they found the people, Christian and non-Christian alike, singing the praises of 'Ching Mu-sz,' as Gilmour was styled in Chinese. There were anxious inquiries as to the state of his health and when he might be expected in Mongolia again. Quite a number spoke of his kindness in curing them of their ailments free of all charge, which to these simple folks was a thing passing understanding. It was evident to these missionaries that Gilmour, by his life and conduct, had created a most favourable impression over a wide area, and thus disposed the minds of many to look favourably on the Christian religion.

It is Mr. Bryson who tells us what Gilmour himself never told—the poorness of the place that he made his headquarters

at Tá Ssŭ Kou. His home was a dingy three-roomed building with brick floors and a low mud wall in front separating it from the general court outside. 'The doors and side-posts,' he says, 'were covered with the torn remains of the usual Chinese New Year's scrolls, wishing health, honour, and fame to the tenants. A few broken steps led into the middle room of the three. It was the kitchen, as was shown by the Chinese cooking-range in the corner and several native utensils. The rafters were smoke begrimed and the walls dingy. On the door to the right of the kitchen hung a screen bearing the words "Jesu Chiau Fu-yin T'ang" (the Glad Tidings Hall of the Jesus Religion). Lifting that we entered Gilmour's sanctum. The k'ang (brick bedstead) occupied the whole length of the room on the left. In the farther corner stood a kind of corn-bin, originally intended for the storing of Chinese cash, but now used to store away books and tracts. There were also the two boxes used by Gilmour to

hold his medicines in the street. The rest of the furniture of the room consisted merely of a table, old and rickety, one bamboo chair, and two benches for worshippers. The roof was low and the whole place not equal to any second-class Chinese inn.'

Yet it was to this humble abode that James Gilmour, fresh from the comforts of home, returned within three weeks of his arrival at Peking. His colleague, Dr. Smith, had been acting as assistant at Tientsin and could not join him for another three months, so Gilmour once more had to face his task alone; but he had never felt fitter in all his life, and the condition in which he found matters when he got to Tá Ssü Kou was so cheering that he resumed his work in high spirits. He had now come to realise that in order to preserve his health he must relax somewhat his rigorous mode of life, so he gave up vegetarianism and resumed a more normal diet. In reading, too, he permitted himself greater latitude.

He still studied his Bible with his accustomed diligence, but by means of newspapers and periodicals he kept himself in touch with the religious and social movements of the world. The beneficial result of these relaxations was soon apparent, for the old despondency that weighed so heavily on Gilmour vanished, and from now onward he became his cheerful self again. Though he longed ardently for the coming of Dr. Smith, he carried on his medical work with a skill that is amazing considering how limited his knowledge was.

Often he was sorely puzzled how to act in some cases, and one in particular shows how anxious his position was. He was in Ch'ao Yang one day when a strangely garbed messenger from the cavalry camp outside the town came into the market-place and asked the foreigner to come and treat two soldiers who had received bullet wounds in an affair with Mongolian brigands. Gilmour had no experience of bullet wounds, in fact had never seen one,

but he judged that he could do no worse than a Chinese doctor. Two of the wounds were easily dealt with, but the third was a bone complication. 'I knew nothing of anatomy,' says Gilmour, 'had no books, absolutely nothing to consult; what could I do but pray?'

The sequel was rather wonderful, for about three days later there came to his stall for medicine to cure a cough, an old man in tattered clothing who was little else but a living skeleton, for every bone in his body seemed to stand out quite distinctly. Though he came for cough medicine Gilmour was soon busy fingering and studying the bones he had to deal with in the case of the wounded soldier. In a few minutes he had gained the information he required, and the man, having got his medicine, hobbled off all unconscious of the service he had rendered to the foreigner. Gilmour hastened to his soldier patient at the earliest opportunity, and, applying the knowledge he had acquired, soon had his wound completely



healed. The incident is remarkable, not only as an answer to prayer but as an example of Gilmour's infinite resource and his ability to take advantage of an opportunity when it offered.

Dr. Smith rejoined Gilmour at the beginning of July 1890, and almost immediately their work was brought to a standstill by an extraordinary rainstorm that lasted for days. The ceilings of their house, composed of reeds and paper, collapsed, and they had actually to erect a tent in the room to keep themselves and their belongings dry. The devastation all over the city was very great, for the houses are not built to stand any excessive rainfall, and indeed, it is only once in four or five years that such abnormal weather is experienced. But even after the storm had spent itself it was difficult to travel any distance because of the flooded state of the roads.

Gilmour describes a journey he took to Ch'ao Yang in August, and the series of adventures he encountered were enough to

make a less venturesome man remain where he was. His mule cart got into a quicksand and we find him up to the waist in water assisting his driver to pull it out ; next he is stuck in a quagmire far down in a lonely ravine and no progress can be made till the cart is dragged out tail first and a new road cut ; again, the cart is upset in a sea of mud and the contents scattered ; while finally, half a mile from the end of the journey, cart and mule disappear into a mud hole, only to be rescued with difficulty.

But Gilmour had learned to treat such experiences as all in the day's work, and he makes light of such happenings. ' One thing made the journey very pleasant,' he writes ; ' it was this. Just as we were starting, one of the Christians, a Chinese farmer, but a man who is poor and dresses and eats poorly, came and gave me two tiao, about 3s. 2d., to give to God.' That act fills Gilmour with such gladness that it lightens all his troubles by the way.

The companionship of Dr. Smith made a

very great difference to Gilmour. Though he still worked as hard as ever, rising at dawn and continuing till late at night, yet the very fact that he had some one to speak to and share his responsibility gave him a totally different outlook on life. But just when the two were beginning to work to each other's hands Dr. Smith was called upon to face the same trial as Gilmour had already faced. His wife died in August, and the shock so impaired his health that after struggling on for a few months, he was compelled to return to England. Fortunately for Gilmour he was not left entirely alone, for the Rev. J. Parker, whom Gilmour powerfully influenced when home on furlough, came up to Mongolia as Dr. Smith left. The loss of his medical colleague, however, was a serious one, and it is no wonder that Gilmour anxiously asks: 'Does God not mean to have a medical man here?'

The lack of proper mission premises seriously troubled Gilmour, and now that

there were little Christian communities springing up in the larger centres, he began to consider the possibility of using the money he had banked in Peking for acquiring the necessary property. His dream was to establish a fully equipped hospital, but his disappointing experiences in failing time after time to get a medical man settled in Mongolia seemed to make the realisation of this wish an impossibility. Matters continued in this way till the spring of 1891, Gilmour plodding on as usual and looking forward to the future with radiant hope. Physically he was so well that he wrote to a friend, half in fun and half in earnest, that he saw no reason why he was not good for another twenty or thirty years' labour, and that the interior suited his health so well that he would probably outlive his fellow workers at Tientsin and Peking. Thus does man propose while God in His wisdom disposes.

## CHAPTER XIII

### 'THE ONE CLEAR CALL'


So many worlds, so much to do,  
So little done, such things to be,  
How knew I what had need of thee,  
For thou wert strong as thou wert true?

TENNYSON.

A TRAIN rattled along the recently constructed railway from Ku Yeh to Tientsin, and at the open end of one of the baggage cars a number of Chinamen sat with their feet dangling. Travelling thus was a new experience to most of them, but they seemed to enjoy the sensation as the train crawled across a slender bridge, while far below them were the rushing waters. Within the van a tall figure leaned against the baggage and watched the daring Chinamen with an amused smile on his face, while every now and again he turned to converse with the old man at his side.

Obviously he was a foreigner and attracted the curious gaze of his fellow travellers, for men of his race never rode in baggage cars, but James Gilmour had never paid any heed to what he deemed useless conventions and needless race distinctions. But a few days ago he had left Ch'ao Yang and made his way by mule cart to the rail-head at Ku Yeh in company with his trusted native, Liu, and as he had to travel with the baggage Gilmour decided that what was good enough for old Liu was good enough for him.

Both men were looking forward to their visit to Tientsin, for during the next month there was to be a great gathering there of all the missionaries and Christian workers in North China. Every year in May this meeting had been held, though for many years Gilmour, owing to his isolated position, had been unable to be present ; but now his way was clear and he had come south hoping and praying that this time of conference would be fruitful of blessing, not only to



himself, but to all those interested in missionary effort.

When Gilmour reached his destination he went to stay with his friend Dr. Roberts, and during the days prior to the opening of the conference everybody remarked on his robust appearance. Never had he been so cheery, and in his own inimitable way he entertained his colleagues with anecdotes of his travels and the men and women he had met. To those who had known him in bygone years it seemed that a nobler and finer James Gilmour had arisen. Hardship and suffering had mellowed him; he was more tolerant of the opinions of others, more tender and solicitous for those about him. In days past he had differed from his brother missionaries on methods, and differed strongly, but he no longer manifested the same aggressiveness and certainty that he was right and they were wrong.

When the Committee charged with the arrangements for the annual gathering met, it was felt that only one man was possible

for the duties of chairman, and that was James Gilmour, and it thus came about that the last days of his pilgrimage on earth were occupied in conducting the affairs of the conference. His duties naturally imposed a considerable strain upon him, but he seemed to be in his usual health till one Saturday evening towards the end of the meetings he complained of feeling tired. By the Monday he was out again, but his place in the chair was taken by a colleague, and in the evening he attended a communion service conducted by his brother-in-law, Mr. Meech. Next day Gilmour was decidedly ill, and symptoms of fever appeared. From the first Gilmour seemed to have a presentiment that his end was near, and he would lie for hours gazing wistfully at the photograph of his boys that stood on a table at his bedside. His friends tried to cheer him by saying that he would soon throw off the attack, but Gilmour shook his head and replied : ' I shall never leave this bed.'



The disease proved to be a very severe form of typhus fever, rendered all the more dangerous by the weak condition of the patient's heart. Day by day he was carefully nursed by loving hands and the best medical skill was lavished upon him without avail. During the second week of his illness his mind became clouded, and in his delirium his talk was ever about his work. Now he would imagine himself preaching in Mongolia, and again it would be his fellow workers he was addressing, urging upon them the necessity of spending their time in waiting on God in prayer for blessing on their labours.

On the morning of May 21, 1891, both the doctors in attendance were agreed that there was no hope of Gilmour's recovery, and towards evening it became clear that he was rapidly sinking. He was quite unconscious but quieter than he had been earlier in the day, and those friends who had gathered round his bed were spared the agony of seeing him suffer. Slowly the

hours dragged on while the breath of the dying man became fainter and fainter. And then, just as night fell over the city, he closed his eyes and with one long-drawn sigh passed out beyond the darkness of earth to greet his loved ones at the portals of the eternal day.

Two days later they carried all that was mortal of James Gilmour and laid him in a grave close to that of his dearly loved friend, Dr. Mackenzie, and amid a blaze of sunshine said the long farewell to their departed comrade. Round the open grave stood the missionary band who had known and valued Gilmour, and grouped beside them were the native Christians, solemnised by the thought that the brave Ching Mu-sz was no more. Just as the farewell hymn was sung a number of little Chinese boys, who had known Gilmour and often received from him the cheery smile of recognition, came forward and threw handfuls of flowers upon the coffin, while a wreath of white blossoms was laid on the grave on behalf

of the orphaned boys in far-off Scotland. And thus they left James Gilmour ‘until the day break and the shadows flee away.’

Across the world flashed the news that the ‘Crusoe of the Mongols’ was dead. Men who had known him only by his writings remarked that an interesting personality was gone ; some who had known him in the days when his brilliant college career compelled attention, cynically declared him another example of a wasted career—he could have done so much, he had achieved so little ; others, who understood his missionary zeal, were inclined to think he had been too zealous and that he ought to have taken greater care of himself and been contented with a less exacting field of labour ; but those who had been in close touch with him realised that Gilmour had chosen what was for him the one and only path of service.

He was barely forty-eight when he died, but he had crowded into his short career an intensity and fixity of purpose that made

his work impossible to be measured by ordinary standards. From his earliest days he had never done anything by halves, and to have asked Gilmour to adjust his pace or conform to the methods of others would have been to destroy the dynamic force of a great individuality. As he was strong in body so was he in mind, and no more valiant soldier of the Cross ever went forth to grapple with the powers of darkness. 'He spared himself in nothing,' said the Rev. G. Owen, speaking at the memorial service held in Peking, 'but gave himself wholly to God. He kept back nothing. All was laid upon the altar. I doubt if even St. Paul endured more for Christ than did James Gilmour. I doubt, too, if Christ ever received from human hands or human heart more loving and devoted service.'

The world is apt to judge the value of a man's work by the visible results, and if that standard be applied to James Gilmour then his life was a failure, for of Mongol converts he could claim very few; but who

can read the story of his life and fail to realise the immense value of the service he rendered to the nomads of the plains and the agriculturists of Eastern Mongolia, or overlook the far-reaching consequences which the influence of his Christ-like life was certain to have. He deliberately chose ground where the harvest was likely to be long delayed, and no one who understood the difficulties of his task believed that the ingathering would be plentiful or early.

But was it worth while? asks the hard-headed practical man. It is always worth while for a man to do the work God calls him to do. He who leads a forlorn hope is oftentimes greater than a conqueror, and God judges not as men judge.

That Gilmour should have been cut off in his prime and his life-work left unfinished is to the man of narrow vision an insoluble mystery and an indication that God meant the Mongols to be left alone. But no one who believes the command of Christ, 'Go ye into *all* the world and preach the Gospel,'

can accept such reasoning. Rather would we see in this story of heroic endeavour a clear call for others to take up the torch that has dropped from failing hands and carry it forward till the lands that sit in darkness are bright with the Light that lightens the world. And to those who may not share in this glorious task, but whose lot is to toil through the long day and pass out from the world before they see the fruit of their toil—to all such the story of James Gilmour is an inspiration and a message from God Himself that on earth is the broken arc, but in Heaven the perfect round.

## EPILOGUE

That what will come, and must come, shall come well.

EDWIN ARNOLD.

MORE than thirty years have passed since James Gilmour's death, and yet Mongolia may still be counted an unoccupied field. The obstacles that confronted Gilmour, particularly in the western portion of the country, remain unsurmounted. It is a land which has been untouched by the march of civilisation, and with its arid wastes and vast sandy plains, is to-day a world by itself. Its people are what they have been for centuries; their customs, their habits, and their way of thinking totally different from those of all others. Isolated as the Mongols are they cling to the traditions of the past, living the tent life of the nomad, following the pursuits of countless generations, and thinking the

same thoughts as those who have gone before them. As of old, religion has a prominent place in their daily life, but it consists of a rigid adherence to a meaningless ritual and a blind belief in the grossest superstition. There are no atheists to be found in Mongolia and every Mongol believes he has an immortal soul, though for him the way to its salvation is shrouded in darkness.

And yet the torch that James Gilmour lighted to illumine this benighted land still flickers on, and brave men with faith unquenched endeavour to reveal the Light of the world to the groping Mongol. At Hallong-Orsa, one of the centres where the nomads are wont to gather at certain seasons, the Swedish Mongol Mission energetically carries on the work, and from this little point of light in a darkened land the Gospel of Jesus Christ radiates across the desert. Farther to the south-west, among the Ordos at Patsebolong, the Scandinavian Mission of North America seeks to evangelise



the tribes that have their settlements along the fringe of the Chinese border. Supplementary to these agencies is the splendid work of the British and Foreign Bible Society, whose colporteurs, following Gilmour's example, make summer journeys across the plains from Kalgan, carrying with them portions of the Scriptures to be distributed among the tents of those among whom they chance to sojourn. But so vast is the country and so scattered its population that direct contact can only be established with a comparatively small number of the people. It thus happens that to most of the Mongols the solitary visit of the colporteur is the only chance they have in all their lives of hearing the message of Christianity spoken to them in their own language by a missionary. What the results of such evangelistic methods are cannot readily be learned, for the Mongol moves hither and thither, and it is only when he happens to visit a mission station that any record of his spiritual

state can be obtained. The seed is sown by the wayside, but in that desolate land God only knows whether it springs up and bears fruit or perishes where it falls. James Gilmour found Western Mongolia the most difficult corner of his Master's vineyard, and those who are following in his steps to-day have a task that is scarcely less hard.

But if the dawn tarries in the West, the light is breaking in Eastern Mongolia, where Gilmour's work among the settled population of Mongols and Chinese has been continued. After his death his colleague, the Rev. J. Parker, carried on and was succeeded by the Rev. J. D. Liddell. Following him Dr. T. Cochrane laboured in the field till the Boxer Rising in 1900 put an end to all operations. The native Christians suffered severely during the terrible days of persecution, and all the mission property was destroyed. When tranquillity was once more restored, reconstruction of the whole missionary organisation became necessary, and the field of Eastern Mongolia

was transferred by the London Missionary Society to the Irish Presbyterian Mission, who appointed the Rev. Andrew Weir to take charge of the district. The position was further strengthened by the advent of the Plymouth Brethren Mission in the region immediately to the west of that worked by the Irish Presbyterians. This arrangement continued till 1910, when the Irish Church found it necessary to contract its field and the whole district was transferred to the Brethren Mission.

Gilmour's work has therefore gone on with practically no cessation since his death, and if Mongol converts have been few, witnesses to the saving power of Jesus Christ have never been lacking. Many of Gilmour's converts have confessed their faith far and wide, the most outstanding among them being Liu Yi, the devoted servant of the pioneer missionary. Twenty years ago he took some medical training, and still the old man can be seen on the streets of Ch'ao Yang or in the villages

near by, following Gilmour's method of combined medical and evangelistic work.

It is said that in the East time is of little import and that the mind of the Oriental is slow to imbibe new ideas. To many of us, accustomed to the more rapid life and thought of the West, the result of missionary effort in Mongolia seems painfully inadequate when compared with the labour expended upon it. We live in an age that looks for quick returns and is impatient when these are lacking. But God works slowly through the ages : on worn cliff and rounded hill this message is plain. What He has purposed He will perform, and in years that are yet unborn even the desert places of far Mongolia will own Him Lord, and hail Him King.





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